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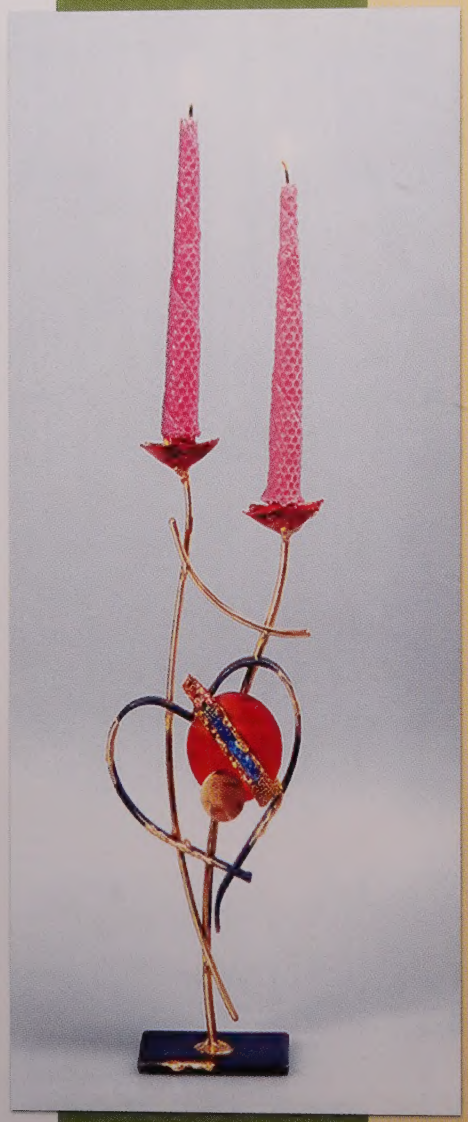

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Lilith

Volume 27, No. 2, Summer 2002

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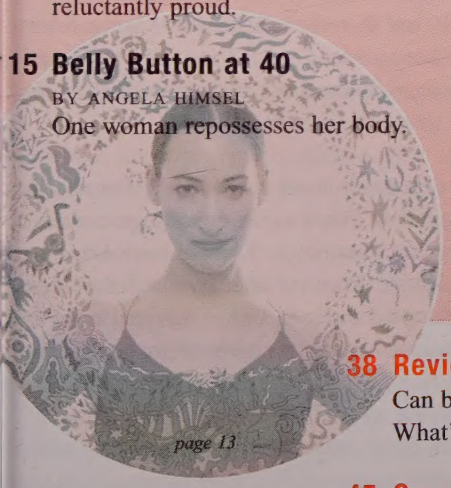
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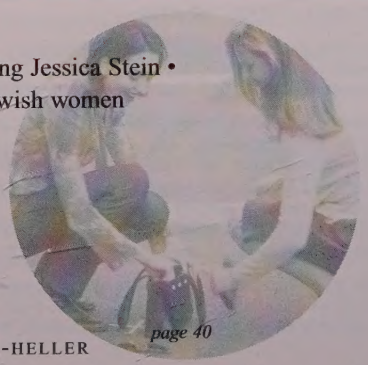
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—from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, *23a-b*

Lilith

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Why is this magazine called Lilith? *In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."*

—from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, *23a-b*

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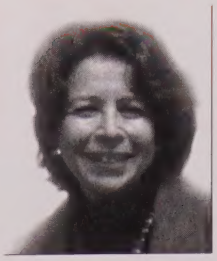
From the Editor



When I began to write about the gifts we give girls, I was thinking about what our presents convey, especially to preteens and teenagers often so vulnerable to the opinions of others. (I'd been analyzing the recent press on "mean girls"; for more on this see the *next* issue of LILITH.)

Then things got metaphorical. Here's what happened.

I have a secret identity. I'm a fix-it freak. Hardware stores make me happy, with their hopeful suggestion that all problems have solutions. Perhaps for the same reason, I love my tool kit. Maybe you feel this too—gratified to be able to build, or to repair, what's broken or damaged.

Maybe it's not too big a leap from diagnosing what's wrong with a stuck door to analyzing how sexism causes women to get stuck.

The presents we give to girls and women . . .

I began to mull over this parallel the other day after an otherwise pleasant al fresco weekend lunch with my husband. Sunny Sunday. Relaxed mood. And then the talk turned to bar and bat mitzvah gifts. "For my bar mitzvah," said Bruce, an intellectual who seems to be challenged by anything with three dimensions, "friends of my parents gave me a power drill set."

Here's what happened next (and please suspend any Freudian interpretations for a moment): "How come nobody gave *me* a drill?" I asked, sniffling and querulous. "I would have *loved* a drill." Tears started to dribble down my cheeks. The force of my reaction really unnerved me. I never thought I'd experienced as a teen the Jewish exclusions many other girls of my generation did; after all, I went to Hebrew school, I had a bat mitzvah. But the inequities of gift-giving were finally what did me in that sunny morning.

I think I felt, suddenly, that friends and family had known only my most obvious traits. Bizarrely enough, four decades later I still recall many of their gifts: the shape and feel of the baby-doll pajamas (for the girly girl in me, I suppose); the Israel bond (from my grandparents); the red leather writing case (Aha!) which I possess to this day; the anthology entitled *Adventure Stories for Girls*. But few of these estimable presents suggested I

had any skills or interests aside from those of a generic, middle-class girl. Where was my power drill? Where was a gift that might have expanded my horizons, taken me beyond the tritest expectations?

The gifts we get say a lot about how people see us. My children, for instance, often grace me with things signifying relaxation. They probably think that *I* need repair, or at least restoration. These are wonderful, take-it-easy-mom presents: a massage session, scented unguents, luxurious products to pamper the weary and the overextended. Though he has also given me traditional stuff, the best present my husband ever gave me was a fully-loaded Swiss army knife.

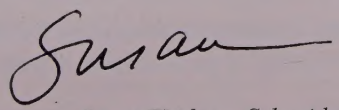
So why haven't I bought *myself* a cordless electric drill? Or a staple gun, come to think of it? The answer is that, like many women, I haven't thought enough about acquiring the tools—literal and figurative tools—I might need or want.

Let us rethink how we want to equip girls at bat mitzvah, or young women at graduation. Maybe they also need tools literal and figurative, and a sense of scale. Maybe we need to give large gifts, in large boxes, to remind girls to think big. And we should give gifts that help them see new possibilities for themselves, help them know what they want, so that they can ask for it—or go get it themselves—next time.

No matter how we rail against a culture encouraging anorexia, girls and women still want to be slender, since the oversized are in truth often scorned or spurned. No wonder so many girls grow up with a diminished sense of scale. And as adult women, we too get caught in a culture of scarcity. We often don't ask for enough of what we need (though the increasing number of philanthropic dollars women give to women's causes does reflect a growing confidence in the work they support).

Somehow, in a world of abundance, girls and women often find our thinking stuck in the constraints of scarcity. Thinness is another word for it. When I give lectures on women's philanthropy, I use as a touchstone what I have called "The Baleboste Mentality"; it comes to us straight from that foremother who could make dinner for 10 people with half a chicken. Instead, we must try to recognize and then enunciate what—and how much—we *really* need.

To that end, I ask you, dear reader, to be aware of the assumptions that underlie your gifts to young women, and the message (whether of expansion or constriction, of abundance or scarcity) that accompanies them.



Susan Weidman Schneider

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Kol Ishah:
"The Voices of Women."

Traditionally, the **voice** of the Jewish woman was **not to be heard** in public, lest it arouse men. **No more.** These pages are for news about Jewish women, **in our own strong voices.**

"I do". . . "I don't"

A Late Marriage, an award-winning Israeli film set in the Georgian community of Tel Aviv, tells the funny and infuriating story of a family's machinations to get their spoiled, 31-year-old son married to a suitable girl, which in their world means a young virgin. But when they discover he is instead having a hot love affair with Judith, a beautiful Moroccan divorcée who is—*horrors*!—34, and has a child, they take the matter into their own hands. When an aunt asks his mother if she would be against Judith without the kid, the mother, played by director **Dover Kosashvili's** own mother, answers: "She could be made of gold. No divorcée under my roof!" The blatant misogyny of the world depicted in this film may roil your gut, but it is well worth seeing for its perfectly calibrated depiction of a slice of Israeli society.

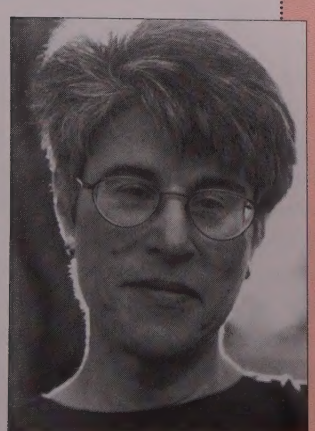
An entirely different take on marriage is *Wedding Advice: Speak Now or Forever Hold Your Peace*, an independent film by **Karen Sosnoski** and **Fred Zeytoonjian**, who have lived together for 19 years without getting married. The film interviews various unconventional experts on this ever-agonizing subject. One expert represents an organization dedicated to finding alternatives to marriage. Lively moments in the film include anti-gay activists heckling participants at a gay marriage rally. Dear to our hearts is former Lilith editor **Sarah Blustain**, talking about her landmark article—from LILITH's special weddings section [Spring 2000]—on why she doesn't want to get married.

Finally, for the *sheyne kalle* (beautiful bride) who might choose as a wedding gift a book entitled *101 Nights of Great Sex* over a set of matching dishes, Good Vibrations, a San Francisco-based sex toy store, is now offering its bridal registry online: www.goodvibes.com.

ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

There's No Prophet in Her Own Land . . .

In a surprise move, **Judith Hauptman**, esteemed professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, will soon be ordained as a rabbi—but not at the flagship institution of the Conservative movement, where she has taught rabbinical students and others since 1974. Instead, she will receive her own rabbinic ordination from the non-denominational Academy of Jewish Religion in Riverdale, New York. Rabbi **Ismar Schorsch**, JTS Chancellor, last year refused Hauptman's request to take the few courses she still needed to qualify for ordination, The Forward newspaper reported. Hauptman received her doctorate from JTS in 1982, one year before the Conservative movement began to admit women into its rabbinical program.



Among the reasons that Rabbi Schorsch gave for denying Hauptman's request was that he could not allow her to take classes with her students. "When you have to give four or five reasons, none is likely to be the real reason," Hauptman told LILITH. While she had really wanted to be ordained at JTS, she said, she went on to note that the Academy for Jewish Religion has "a wonderful, supportive atmosphere."

Hauptman is particularly interested in advocating for the role of Jewish elderly in synagogue life and the rebuilding of the downtown Jewish community in the wake of 9/11.

"As a rabbi," Hauptman said, "I will have a greater voice."

A.S.A.

Safeguarding Women's Rights

For information on upcoming legislation that affects women, read the newsletter of The Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress. Appropriately, their tag line is "Proudly Jewish, Actively Feminist." It reports on issues such as the fight to maintain *Roe v. Wade*, the debate over mammography, and federal health insurance for children. *American Jewish Congress, 212-879-4500; www.ajc.org*

● On the state level, the New York UJA Federation formed a new Women's Public Policy Task Force, 212-836-1858. In April, women met with legislators in Albany to discuss privacy issues around genetic testing and to request increased funding to combat family violence. They also noted the recently increased Medicaid coverage for the treatment of breast and cervical cancer. *www.ujafedny.org;* e-mail; *TaskForceJ.Woman@ujafedny.org*

● "As a Jewish and women's organization, we can't sit silently by in the face of sweeping changes," says **Sammie Moshenberg**, director of Washington operations of the National Council of Jewish Women. Moshenberg was referring to the movement afoot to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. In response, NCJW has recently undertaken the "Benchmark" campaign to lobby senators to vote against appointing any federal judicial nominee who is anti-choice. "The Jewish community is overwhelmingly pro-choice," says Moshenberg. "But people don't realize how much is decided at the federal circuit court level. If people don't stand up and take notice, our rights could be gone." *www.ncjw.org.*

A.S.A.

A Break with Spring Break

For many college students, spring break is a time to lie on a beach. But in 1999, **Stephanie Fingeroth**, assistant director of outreach and education at the American Jewish World Service, discovered that many Jewish students were looking for more. In response, the AJWS, together with Hillel, created the "Alternative Spring Break" program.

Participants in the spring program this year spent one week assisting with the projects of La Coordinadora in El Salvador, an AJWS partner that promotes sustainable economic development in a region plagued by poverty, civil war, and natural disasters. In addition to the physical labor involved in building houses and farming, the week-long program included daily Jewish text study as well as a shabbat celebration.

"For a week or two after I got back, I was just glowing," says **Dana Blecher**, a graduate student at the Columbia School of Social Work who was in El Salvador in March. "It feels good to see that your work is making a difference and to know that it is really appreciated." She also points out that the program enabled students to connect to their Judaism in a context outside of synagogue.

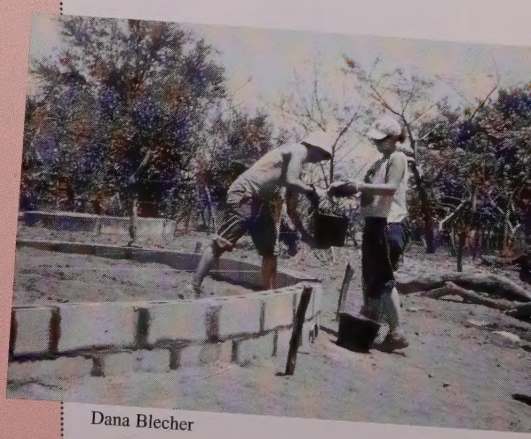
Students from Barnard and Columbia who participated in this year's program followed up by selling Mother's Day gift certificates to raise money for "The Chicken Project," which combats malnutrition by helping low-income El Salvadorians breed poultry. The certificates read: "Dear Mom . . . Just as you have always watched out for my needs, so will the donation of a chicken to the people of El Salvador help a mother take care of the needs of her family and children."

RACHEL KRANSON

For more information about ***alternative spring breaks****, contact sfingeroth@ajws.org. Web sites: www.ajws.org; www.hillel.org*

JEWISH GRANDES DAMES:

LILITH notes the recent passing of three exemplary Jewish women. Painter **Theresa Bernstein**, whose Realist-style urban tableaux included studies of 1912 suffrage parades, died in February at 111. Bernstein, wrote Douglas Martin in The New York Times, "was both hailed and flailed for 'painting like a man' in the 1910s." In April, **Chaike Spiegel**, 81, one of the last surviving fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943, died in Montreal; she had immigrated with her husband, also a ghetto fighter, in 1948. **Ruth Handler**, 85, creator of Barbie, the teenage doll whose outré female proportions and glam outfits fed little girls' fantasies and enraged feminists, died in April. "About feminist criticism, I don't even respond to that," Handler told LILITH in a 1994 interview. "The fact that Barbie is so loved speaks for itself."



Dana Blecher

MIKVAHS ARE HOT

In your grandmother's day, it was only Orthodox women who still went to the mikvah every month. Liberal Jewish women denounced the laws of *taharat ha-mishpachah*—family purity—as reactionary and sexist. But now, women from all over the Jewish spectrum seem to be reclaiming and reshaping the ancient rite that their mothers and grandmothers long ago abandoned. Reporter **Debra Nussbaum Cohen** in the New York Jewish Week recently described one non-Orthodox bride's pre-nuptial visit to a mikvah, where three friends danced around her in a circle, showering her with candies. Other women are using the mikvah in even less traditional ways. Women associated with The Mikvah Project, a touring exhibit of photos and accompanying interviews now at the Spertus Museum in Chicago, for example, described a woman who went to the mikvah to celebrate coming out as a lesbian. Another used it as part of the healing process from childhood sexual abuse. That a recently-formed all-women's klezmer band named itself Mikvah—"in tribute to the . . . place of monthly immersion marking the cycles of women's lives, sexuality, and creativity"—proves that even the term is shedding its old patriarchal connotation.

But for all the New-Age feel of the mikvah movement, for some women, the old associations with impurity and misogyny remain. "I went before I got married, just as I was supposed to do," said a young woman who has rejected the Orthodox world in which she grew up. "Then I started going regularly. It began to feel like something I was doing out of guilt. For my own sanity I had to stop. Maybe I'd like it if I could do it on my own terms, without those associations."

A.S.A.

The Mikvah Project, *which features photos by Janice Rubin and interviews by Leah Lax, will run at the Spertus Museum, 618 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Il. www.spertus.edu. until October, 2002. It will then travel around the country.*

"THE ESSENCE OF ABUSE IS SECRECY"

This season, the Catholic church is being forced to confront as never before issues of clergy sexual abuse. "The straw that broke the camel's back was not sexuality, but silence," writes Catholic theologian **Mary E. Hunt**.

At the same time, disturbing incidents involving Jewish clergy are also being reported in the news. LILITH has in the last year reported on several incidents [see LILITH Winter 2001 and Spring 2001]. The latest was in February, when **Cantor Howard Nevison**, 61, was arrested for allegedly molesting his nephew, now 12, between 1993 and 1997. Nevison's voice had for 24 years echoed in the sanctuary of New York's majestic Reform Temple Emanu-El on Fifth Avenue.

The boy first told the authorities about his uncle in 1998, when he also accused two other relatives of sexual abuse: Lawrence Nevison, Howard Nevison's brother, and

Lawrence Nevison's son, Stewart. Both Lawrence and Stewart Nevison were convicted. The father remains in jail, while his son is out on bail.

Although Cantor Nevison subsequently told Emanu-El administrators about his nephew's allegations, the temple kept the revelation secret, according to The New York Times and The New York Jewish Week. When the story broke, temple officials circled the wagons, refusing for days to speak publicly about the scandal, except to acknowledge that the cantor had spoken about the accusation in the past. In April, the New York Jewish Week reported that Emanu-El members had established a legal defense fund for Nevison. Nevison is now out on bail, awaiting trial. He has not resigned from his position at Emanu-El.

LILITH asked psychotherapist **Peter Fraenkel**, member of the sex abuse project at the Ackerman Institute for the Family in Manhattan and the co-author, with **Marcia Sheinberg**, of *The Relational Trauma of Incest*, What should Emanu-El have done in the face of the allegations about Nevison?

"They should have made a statement to validate the seriousness of what the child is saying," Fraenkel declared. And while accused persons are presumed innocent until proven guilty, "Temple officials should acknowledge the possible truth of the child's statement." Research shows, Fraenkel said, that children rarely make up such accusations.

"The secrecy sends the message that adult men come first over kids," said Fraenkel.

"The essence of abuse is secrecy," said couples and family therapist **Esther Perel**, who has worked extensively in the area of sexuality. "If you, as an institution, maintain secrecy, then you are feeding the core of molestation."

A.S.A.

MAZAL TOV TO...

Joanne Jaffe, assistant chief of the New York City Police Department, was honored in April by The Jewish Women's Foundation of New York. Jaffe is the highest-ranking woman in the NYPD, where she does strategic planning for police commissioner Raymond Kelly. Jaffe says that her grandmother was embarrassed that she wanted to be a cop.

Deborah Lipstadt, recognized for her outstanding work in fighting Holocaust deniers. The historian received an honorary doctorate by Bar Ilan University in November.

Rabbi Janet Marder, elected vice president of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis. Traditionally, those who hold this position then assume the CCAR presidency. Rabbi Marder is the first woman to hold such a senior position in the Reform Movement.

Rebecca Metzger, who received a Simon Rockower award from the American Jewish Press Association for her coverage of Jewish Singles in Lilith [To be Single, Jewish and Female in the Internet Age, Fall 2001].

A.S.A.

A BEIT DIN OF PEERS

According to the Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan, there is no legal obstacle preventing women from serving on rabbinical courts, The Jerusalem Post reported in March. **Rabbi Ya'acov Ariel** also has a solution to the practical problem of women sitting next to men on the bench: some panels, he told The Post, could consist entirely of female judges.

Orthodox feminist leader **Blu Greenberg** said that she was gratified by Rabbi Ariel's good-faith attempts to open up the tradition more fully to women. "The key, of course," Greenberg said, "will now be communal follow-through."

PRICELESS SHOPPING

Bobbie's Place, located in a in a Brooklyn basement, is a "pretend" clothing store where needy Orthodox families can go to outfit their children in brand-new clothes for the holidays, The New York Times reported in March. Each garment has a price tag, though no money is charged at the checkout counter—the clothes are free.

Why all the pretense? **Avi and Michal Schick**, the "owners" of Bobbie's Place, insist that the children of needy families don't need to know that they are the recipients of charity.

Bobbie's Place is named for the Schicks' grandmother, **Renee Schick**, their philanthropic role model. All 17 of Schick's grandchildren contribute to the operation of the "store."

WHAT JEWISH TEEN GIRLS ARE DOING NOW

A SURPRISING SUMMER VACATION

This past summer I embarked on a journey. When I started out, all I knew was that my journey was labeled a Jewish community service trip around the country. In my house, we go to synagogue on the High Holy Days and I go to Hebrew high school, but that is about it. How was I going to get through six weeks worth of shabbats? I figured I'd learn . . .

So I went, and I loved every minute of it. We went to Maine, Colorado, Utah, and Georgia. I learned so much about Judaism, and everything around me, and even about myself—it was incredible. There were 38 of us (including adults)—a little more than half of us were girls—sharing this amazing learning experience. The *Tiyul* (the word means "trip" in Hebrew) was not a day in the park; it was hard work a lot of the time, both physically and emotionally. The trip was all about *tikkun olam*. The director, **Sharon Goldman**, who is also teen director at the 92nd Street Y in New York, said that just as we should do good for the world, we should also do good for ourselves. So we ate off reusable mess kits, not paper goods. We did everything from removing garbage from the basement of a synagogue, to creating a camp for underprivileged children, to doing work in state parks. Why Sharon Goldman can't find as many boys as girls to go on such a trip is a mystery to me.

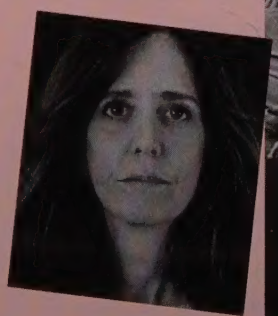
HARA HOFF

Helen Schary Motro, a columnist for the Jerusalem Post and a correspondent for Women's E-news, is one of nine journalists to win a Common Ground Journalism award. Her story "That Boy Who Wore Our Hand-Me-Downs," which appeared in the Jerusalem Post in October 2001, describes her shock and pain when she recognizes—in a photo run on front pages all over the world—the Palestinian man who had worked for her, and to whom she had given her children's outgrown clothes. His son Mohammed, wearing a shirt that once belonged to Motro's child, lay dead in his arms after an exchange of fire between Israeli and Palestinian soldiers in Gaza.

JEWISH GIRLS, THE MUSICAL

In May, the Jewish Community Center of Manhattan presented "Jewish Girls," a work-in-progress by award-winning composer and writer **Elizabeth Swados**, whose Broadway credits include The Cherry Orchard, Agamemnon, Doonesbury, and Runaways. For the JCC production, which was funded by the Hadassah Foundation, Swados chose 12 New York Jewish teenagers from diverse backgrounds. Together they created musical skits about a range of subjects that included body image and how much one teenager hated growing up in Great Neck, NY. In the fall Swados plans to take the production to schools, possibly even to Broadway.

A.S.A.



JUDIOS LATINOS: YOUNG LATIN AMERICAN JEWS IN THE US

Latin American Jews in New York come from various countries, including Argentina, Mexico, Columbia, Guatemala and Venezuela. According to Hillel International, their numbers are growing. They come primarily to escape political upheaval, to study at American universities and for employment opportunities. This is not such a new story. In fact, my own mother immigrated to the United States from Cuba in 1961, at the start of Castro's regime.

This past January, **Karina Muller**, 31, an Argentine immigrant living in New York, approached me about starting an interest group for Latin American Jews living in the city. As the membership and community development associate at Makor, a center of New York's 92nd Street Y that reaches out to Jews in their 20s and 30s, I cultivate and facilitate groups of young Jews.

Although Karina came to the States with her family, there are also many Latin American Jews who have immigrated to New York—and other communities in the United States—on their own as young adults. "We need to give this community a voice, a chance for my peers to show their films, express their literature and gain opportunity," says Karina. **Michel Geldzweig**, 30, who emigrated from Mexico says, "It would be refreshing to be able to connect with people who have similar views and backgrounds in a city as diverse as New York. One can feel very lost in this city and it would be a great thing to have an 'at home' feeling, even when one is not." Makor decided to create a venue for young, dislocated Jews with roots in Latin America.

The group's first event was the screening of a Mexican film directed by **Guita Schyfter**, "Novia Que Te Vea" [reviewed on page 22], which deals with the friendship between a Sephardic and an Ashkenazic woman coming of age in Mexico in the 1960s. Many of the seventy-plus people who attended the screening told me afterwards how important this film was to them. **Vanesa Maya** from Argentina said, "This film made me cry. The Ladino songs were exactly the songs that my grandmother sang when she was making me bourekas and reshicas."

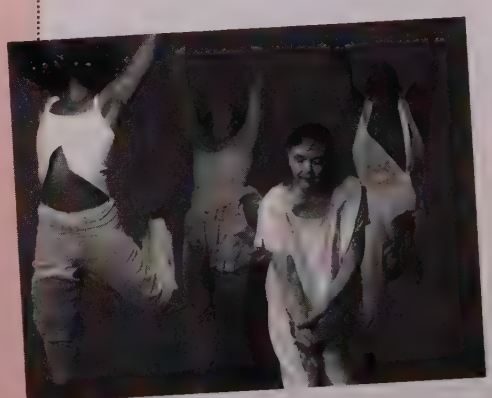
This summer, a Latin-Jewish Literary Reading features two leading authors: Mexican-American **Ilan Stavans**, author of *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language*, and leading promoter of Latin-American and Latin-Jewish writing; and Pulitzer-prize-winning journalist **Achy Obejas**, whose debut novel, *Days of Awe*, about a Cuban Jewish family, was published last year.

AMY GREENSTEIN

For more information about ***Judios*** *os at Makor, contact Amy Greenstein at enstein@92ndsty.org or 212-601-1033*

IN THE ARTS. . .

In August, the **Liz Lerman** Dance Exchange company will present *Hallelujah/USA* in College Park, Maryland, the culmination of a four-year project of dance productions staged all over the country in partnership with local communities. *Information: 301-270-6700.*



This year, two of the four annual Koret Foundation's Jewish Book Awards went to women. **Nathalie Babel**, daughter of the Russian writer, won the fiction prize as editor of *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel* (W.W. Norton). In biography, **Dorothy Gallagher** won for her quirky memoir *How I Came Into my Inheritance and Other True Stories* (Random House).

A Safe House in Kenya

The Associated Press reports that **Eve Ensler**, author of "Vagina Monologues," has financed a safe house for girls in Kenya. This country is one in which female circumcision, although now illegal, is still widely practiced. At the shelter the girls can seek refuge from forced marriage and female genital cutting, and also learn about the dangers of the latter, which include bleeding to death and contracting HIV from unsanitary instruments. According to The World Health Organization, nearly 137 million women have been subjected to this mutilation.

Outspoken Jewish Students

A chilling undercurrent of anti-Semitism surfaced this spring on the Harvard campus. On the morning of April 2, nearly 80 first-year Harvard Law students received fliers in their mailboxes bearing a swastika and anti-Semitic statements. "I hope you all rot [in] hell with your yamukas [sic]," the flier reads, reported **Stephanie M. Skier** in The Harvard Crimson.

Although there is no direct connection between this flier and criticism of Israel, many Jewish students, particularly those coming from predominantly Jewish high schools and communities, were shocked by both the anti-Semitism and the growing anti-Israel sentiment. Departing African-American studies professor **Cornel R. West** drew unfavorable comparisons between Prime Minister **Ariel Sharon** and Jewish Harvard President **Lawrence H. Summers**. A Crimson op-ed piece published April 11th by second-year law student **Faisal Chaudhry** raised similar issues. Chaudhry's description of "Israel's racist colonial occupation" received responses from numerous students, including Harvard's resident on-screen royalty, **Natalie Portman**. Portman replied that "most Israelis and Palestinians are indistinguishable physically. . . Israelis and Arabs are historically cousins."

West's and Chaudhry's statements comparing Israelis to racial oppressors seem to represent surging campus opinion. An art exhibit entitled "Innocence under Fire" was mounted at Harvard in March. Sponsored by the Society of Arab Students and organized by the Chicago-based Palestinian arts council al-Phan, the exhibit featured drawings by Palestinian children of heavily armed Israeli soldiers attacking unarmed Palestinian youth. The exhibit was well advertised on student e-mail lists and posters around campus.

In May, 39 Harvard faculty members signed a divestment petition, which Chaudhry helped organize, calling for Harvard to drop investments in Israeli companies and U.S. firms selling weapons to Israel. Soon, other Harvard faculty, students and alums e-mailed Harvard's president protesting the divestiture proposal.

In the face of these rising sentiments, Harvard Hillel has been busy. Hillel members have been engaged in productive conversation with opposing contingents. One discussion group of Arab and Jewish students has met regularly to "listen to each other, respect each other's right to hold a different opinion, and in that way increase our understanding about the complexity of the situation through a repeated, personal exchange," writes **Eli Kramer**, the group's coordinator.

While acknowledging different viewpoints, Hillel on the whole shows strong support for Zionism. Israel Independence Day celebrations went on as planned. And a large contingent of students, organized by Hillel staff, traveled to Washington, D.C., for the April rally in support of Israel. Non-Hillel affiliates have also shown their support for Israel through responses published in The Crimson. Anti-divestment op-eds have been published, and protest letters circulated. But the question remains whether Harvard's non-Jewish population will be drawn into the anti-Israeli rhetoric or will resist it. The campus at the close of the term is teetering between fierce but open political discussion and skewed polemics.

MARGOT KAMINSKI

Did you have an African-American nanny (or housekeeper) when you were a child? Do you have thoughts about what the relationship meant to you?

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Genesis 24 tells how the adventures of our foremother Rebekah began with a nose ring.

One evening, when Rebekah went to draw water from the well outside of Aram-Naharaim, she saw a stranger standing with ten thirsty-looking camels. This stranger—who turns out to be Eliezer, servant of the patriarch Abraham—asked Rebekah for a sip of water, and she did not hesitate; she lowered her jar and let him drink. And when he finished, she insisted upon drawing water for all of his camels as well.

After the camels stopped drinking, Eliezer—who, incidentally, was on the lookout for an appropriate wife for Isaac, Abraham's son—gave Rebekah a golden nose ring and two golden bangles. Rebekah's brother Laban saw the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms, and he knew that something out of the ordinary had happened at the well. Eliezer told them both the entirety of his miraculous tale, how he prayed for a woman to offer both him and his camels some water to drink—and for that woman to be the one that Isaac was destined to marry. No sooner had he uttered the prayer than he chanced upon the lovely Rebekah.

And the rest, as they say, is Biblical history.

A NOSE RING OF HER OWN

RACHEL KRANSON

There is no indication in the Biblical text that the nose ring that Eliezer gave to Rebekah was of any particular significance; like the golden bangles, it was a simple gift for a potential bride, a way to let Rebekah and her family know that her suitor was generous and well-to-do.

But in the Midrashic imagination of a writer who spent her late adolescence in the 1990s—a time when the nose pierce was, perhaps, the ultimate symbol of teen-age rebellion—Rebekah's nose ring emerges as a symbol of Biblical proportions.

I imagine Rebekah returning from the well to Laban's house, now the first girl in Aram-Naharaim to wear a golden stud in her nose.

What is that ***thing*** *in your nose? This is exactly why I keep telling you not to speak to strangers at the well! Do you want people to say that you are as crazy as your cousin Abraham, who traveled to Gods-know-where because he heard some voices in his head?*

But Rebekah, with a defiant flash of her bejeweled nose, tells her brother that her body is her own, that she absolutely *will* continue to speak to strangers, to commit rash and random acts of kindness, even if it means throwing out her back to draw water for ten insatiable camels that Eliezer could have just as easily watered himself. And Aram-Naharaim is such a sleepy little village—Rebekah dreams of traveling to Canaan (she always did have a taste for milk and honey.) She wants to hear words of wisdom from Abraham—rumor has it he can talk to angels—and to gaze into the eyes of his handsome son.

And as she packs her bags to meet her destiny, our brave and fashionable foremother considers dying her hair a deep purple, or maybe getting a tattoo . . .

CHARLOTTE HONIGMAN-SMITH

Jewish Women Modified: The Halachic Skinny on Piercing and Tattoos

Back in the early 90's, Davka, a magazine for twenty-something Jews, ran a cover photograph of a tattooed woman with purple hair, wearing a tallis and tefillin and not much else.

Reviews of the new magazine in various 'alternative' periodicals all hastened to point out how shocking the cover was. A woman! With tattoos! And purple hair! Wearing tefillin! It's . . . forbidden, right? Of course, the cover was meant to shock, or at least grab your attention. But I noticed the way that people responding to it, Jews as well as gentiles, couldn't quite sort out which parts were actual violations of Jewish tradition, and which were just oddball or eye-catching because of the contrast between the *frum* and the *punk* elements in the picture.

For young Jewish women, the confusion that cover photo created points to some significant issues. American Jewish women are increasingly interested in bringing Jewish learning and tradition into our lives. (Even those of us who aren't at all observant connect to the community through family, social events, and cultural practices.) And Generation X is into the body as art. Tattoos are more mainstream now than they've been in a long time, and nose, eyebrow, lip and nipple piercings are not uncommon. We dye our hair pink, we henna our hands and rub glitter on our faces and over our breasts before we go out dancing. We decorate ourselves in all kinds of ways, some temporary, some permanent. And Jewish women are often confused about the Jewish significance of all of this. What's okay? What's not? What are the consequences if I go over the line? Do I get to come back? So here's the straight scoop on some basics about Judaism and these body adornments.

Illustration by Rachael Sage from her album "painting of a painting"

You know, the Jewess with the rose tattoo . . .

Most people have been told at one point or another that 'if you have a tattoo, you can't be buried in a Jewish cemetery'. I have heard this dozens of times, often from gentiles, many times from other Jews. I've heard it given as a reason for not getting a tattoo, a reason *for* getting a tattoo, and a reason that Judaism is an outdated screwy culture and religion that ought to be abandoned. I've also run across many people who believe that if you've had your ears or other parts pierced, you can't be buried in a Jewish cemetery. A lot of Jews who have tattoos and piercings firmly believe this. Silja Talvi, in her essay 'Marked for Life: tattoos and the redefinition of self', writes that 'Jewish edicts further prohibit the burial of a tattooed person, a prohibition I learned about only after having been tattooed."

Wrong! And so are the many Jews, some quite observant, who believe the same thing. Jews with tattoos can and are buried in Jewish cemeteries, and Jews with piercings are buried in Jewish cemeteries. A fact (Jewish law does forbid tattooing, and Jews with tattoos are not viewed with a lot of favor by the observant) has been blown up into a pervasive idea that tattooing, and maybe all forms of body modification, is grounds for being excluded from Jewish burial, automatically kicked out of the Jewish community for all eternity. This is not true. The Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards said in a 1998 statement on tattooing and piercing:

Tattooing is an explicit prohibition from the Torah. However, those who violate this prohibition may be buried in a Jewish cemetery and participate fully in all synagogue ritual. While no sanctions are imposed, the practice should continue to be discouraged as a violation of the Torah. Body piercing is not prohibited although legitimate concerns regarding tzniut (modesty) and other traditional Jewish values should be taken into consideration and guide one's choices.

Modern Orthodox and Reform sources agree. I cite this piece of responsa because it clearly sums up the normative interpretation of Jewish law as it relates to this issue. Show this to your Uncle Nathan who told you that you were out of Hills of Eternity, and calm down your Bubbe who believed him and who's been in a panic since you got your girlfriend's name inked on your shoulder.

Tattooing is indeed forbidden by Jewish law, and that prohibition is taken somewhat more seriously by the Jewish community than many others. Its forbidden qualities may have been reinforced by the fact that, traditionally, tattooing was seen as a lower class thing, not an appropriate behavior for respectable working people, or those in the middle class. Busy trying to survive and thrive in the New World, Jews were unlikely to adopt an alien custom that was both forbidden by Jewish tradition and associated with marginal people by the dominant culture.

The uneasiness of contemporary Jews about tattooing has recent horror behind it as well. For many Jews, tattooing recalls the experience of prisoners in Nazi camps. In a family or community with members who are survivors, tattooing's negative connotations can be resounding, and disapproval of a Jew who gets a tattoo for whatever reasons can be extreme. This is one reason Jewish women often give for deciding not to get tattoos. Others get them for this very reason . . . some children and grandchildren of survivors have told me that for them, getting a tattoo with a positive meaning was a way of healing the family trauma.

Yes, nose rings are in the Torah . . .

Piercing is another matter entirely. Have you heard that Jews are forbidden to have pierced ears? Or that you can't be buried in a Jewish cemetery if you have pierced ears? Hasn't anyone who repeats this ever read *All-Of-A-Kind Family*? Doesn't anyone remember the chapter where Sarah turns ten and her uncle takes her to get her ears pierced?

Jewish women have been piercing their ears and noses in complete accordance with Jewish law and local beauty standards since very ancient times. There are references in the Tanach to women wearing earrings and nose rings, and being given such jewelry as engagement gifts [See Rachel Kranson's "A Nose Ring of her Own," page 12]. In European communities, nose rings weren't worn since they didn't coincide with European fashions—but Jewish women in some Middle Eastern and Indian communities certainly wore them. And Ashkenazic women continued to pierce their ears.

In fact, during the experimental heyday of early Jewish feminist ritual creation in the 1970s, suggestions were made that girls' ears could be pierced at eight days, as a feminine form of the brit. (My mom points out that in some Sephardic communities it's an established convention to pierce baby girls' ears, so even the radical is traditional.)

I know a "mikvah lady" who mentions that there is a problem with taking piercings into the mikvah if you have had the ring soldered shut so that it can't be removed. In order to make a kosher dip in the mikvah, you need to remove all your jewelry, including piercings, so that nothing gets between your body and the water. If you use a mikvah for any reason, or will have reason to in the future, bear this in mind before getting any body jewelry that can't be taken out briefly.

But there is nothing in Jewish tradition that states that you can't have pierced ears, a nose ring, a pierced eyebrow, navel, nipples, or whatever your little heart desires.

Read up on the law. This tradition belongs to us, so let's know what's really written!

CHARLOTTE HONIGMAN-SMITH is a writer and activist living in San Francisco. She edits Maydeleh, a zine for nice Jewish grrrls, where a version of this article appeared.

ROBERTA ISRAELOFF

When My Kid Got a Tattoo...

My nineteen-year-old son Ben called us from college and said, "I want to get a tattoo. What do you think?"

What did I think? I wanted to puke.

The idea was abhorrent to me. Hot needles filled with dye scorching his beautiful skin?

I tried to stay composed. I sought facts. "What kind?" I asked. "And where?"

"Just a small one," he said, "on my forearm." Where the skin is softest, most delicate, most protected, least exposed to sun and wind.

"A 'chai.'"

He went on to explain that this was a way to reclaim his Jewishness, to choose to announce his tribal affiliation in the very place where Holocaust victims were forced to bear it. Their tattooed numbers were a sign of their subjugation; his symbol of life was about redemption.

Never had anything he said in his entire nineteen years shut me up as dumbly as that. "So what do you think?" he asked again.

I didn't know whether to *plotz* or *kvell*.

"I think it's a beautiful sentiment," I said. "But I don't like the idea of any permanent change on your body. There's also a risk of disease."

"I'll go to a safe place, so that's minimal," he said. "Anyway, I just want it."

"You may decide at one point that you don't want it any more."

"How could that happen?" he said, genuinely perplexed. "I'll always be Jewish."

"Well," I said, knowing I probably shouldn't continue, "what if an employer objects to it. Or you meet a girl who doesn't love it."

"Then that would tell me something important about them," he said. The more desperate I became, the wiser he sounded.

"How about I buy you a gold Jewish star, you can wear it on a chain?"

"I don't want *jewelry*," he said, as if I were offering him a used tissue.

Well, I told myself when I hung up the phone, at least he's not piercing his nose. Or his genitals. (Knowing Ben, he'd probably apprise me of this as well. He likes to keep us abreast of the status of his rebellion.)

When he came home for Passover, he was wearing a long-sleeved shirt. In the living room, he dramatically rolled up his sleeve, and there it was, unveiled, a shaded black chai, roughly an inch and a half in length. Permanent.

"Wow, I want a tattoo too," said Jake, fourteen. My husband and I gave him the "not till you're nineteen" look. Then we all touched it. Ben wanted us to say we liked it, and we said we did.

Over time, I have grown fond of it, even attached to it, as if it were a touchstone beauty mark. Yet running my finger over it, I always register the shock of black ink on flesh. Sometimes it seems slightly raised. I imagine the needle pricking his skin, try to intuit the sensation. What he sought in pursuing this symbol of Jewish identification is precisely what I shrink from: the experience of pain, and indelibility.

ROBERTA ISRAELOFF is a free-lance writer and author of *Kindling the Flame: Reflections on Ritual, Faith and Family* (Simon and Schuster).

ANGELA HIMSEL

Belly-Button Bliss: Pierced at 40!

When Rabbi Akiva, the great Torah scholar, turned 40, he began studying Jewish texts. As I approached 40, I was thinking not of re-claiming my spiritual heritage but rather of repossessing my body. I wanted a belly-button ring.

For years I'd harbored this desire. However, I'd resisted the urge out of consideration for my children's tender feelings. They were even humiliated when I talked to strangers in the grocery store.

But then the kids went off to camp last summer. And I fumed to myself: "Why should I accept other people's definition of what a mom should be? Haven't I already foregone my sleep, my breasts and body to nurture and suckle these babes? Must I also give up my dream of a stud through my belly button?"

In the past, such a private rant over the plight of women and their continued oppression in this world would have burned itself out after a few days. Not this time. For I was turning 40. Jewishly, the number 40 indicates that a cycle is complete, and it is time to move on to the next stage. In the Bible, the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert, the flood lasted for 40 days, Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days. And then there was Rabbi Akiva.

Thus it was that last summer—without discussing it with my husband, lest he disapprove—I set out with my supportive niece, Jacqui, to the East Village in Manhattan. After one quick, not too painful pinch in the middle of the abdomen, I became the proud owner of an adorable barbell ring. Afterwards, over lunch, Jacqui and I analyzed in all its complexity this sudden ability to act upon a long-buried yearning. Jacqui suggested that, after years of pregnancy, in which I'd sheltered another being within my body, getting my navel pierced represented re-asserting my Self. And I was reassured that not only was this not some frantic grab for my misspent youth, but was rather the action of a mature, adult woman.

My maturity and mental health, however, were called into question by my 12-year-old son, David, when a month later I finally 'fessed up and offered my kids a discreet peek at my birthday present to myself. "You psychopath!" David screamed at me, turning his head away in absolute disgust. He went on to tell me that I was an embarrassment and I had better never wear anything in front of his friends that would expose my navel ring and, presumably, reveal to his peers that he had a crazy mother.

(Later that week, when David was cranky over something, I threatened to lift my shirt in front of his friends. Ever since, I've found this to be a much more effective disciplinary tool than time-outs.)

My 10-year-old daughter's reaction was supportive—"You rock, mom!"—while my seven year old looked at it curiously for a second and shrugged.

My 24-year-old nephew admitted that he liked it and thought it was sexy, but he was perplexed. Why had I done it, if I didn't show it off with skimpy tops? "The only reason I dress nicely and get my hair cut and take a shower is to make a good impression on others," he admitted. Jacqui and I looked at each other, shook our heads and said: "Men."

Most interesting and surprising have been other women's responses to the news of my navel piercing. Friends my age and older have confessed, in hushed voices, that they'd always wanted a tattoo or a pierce, but hadn't done it. Why? Because their husbands or boyfriends wouldn't approve.

Well, for me, turning 40 was the reason I was *free* to do it. Like Rabbi Akiva, doing something just because I wanted to indicated to me that I'd entered a new cycle. The assumptions I associated with the umbilical cord and all that it represented—nurturing my children, trying to live up to the wife and mom image, consulting my husband before making decisions—were what had *really* been pierced.

ANGELA HIMSEL'S fiction and non-fiction have appeared in many magazines and newspapers. She lives in New York City with her family.

Illustrations by Rachael Sage from her album "painting of a painting"

HOMELAND/DIASPORA

Now, when national identity and the rights and plights it confers make headlines every day, LILITH turns the spotlight on Jewish women's lives in very different diaspora communities. Here is what remains the same: No matter where we live, the issue of identity is never easy for Jewish women. Many of us struggle to negotiate multiple and sometimes conflicting loyalties—to family, Jewish community, to other women, to the country in which we live. For Jews, our history of moving from one country to the next—whether by choice or by force—can make the construction of a coherent national or cultural identity into a particularly complicated project.

In this section, we meet Jewish women working to piece together cultural and political identities from disparate influences. One woman, whose family moved to Greece after the Spanish Inquisition 500 years ago, still identifies as Spanish. Another Jewish woman, whose ancestors left Baghdad for India generations ago, aligns herself politically and nationally with non-white South-Asian feminists. Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Soviet Union build new lives in the United States, and Latin-American Jewish women express that, in the words of writer and activist Marjorie Agosín, they are "always from somewhere else."

Maybe we can trace our roots to Eastern Europe or the Middle East. Maybe our Jewish communities of origin are still thriving. But many are mere remnants of what they once were, or have vanished altogether, like Atlantis (or Elephantine). Wherever we gather them, we are all looking for ways to make sense of the fragments.

ELLINIDES EVRAIES
JEWISH WOMEN OF GREECE

ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

GREEK-JEWISH WOMEN ARE the bearers and transmitters of a rich but nearly vanished culture. Jews have lived in Greece continuously since antiquity, with Greek Jewish culture reaching its apogee after 1492, when thousands of Jews who had been expelled from Spain found refuge there at the invitation of the Turkish sultan. Today, though, the Jewish presence in Greece is mostly a memory. Of the approximately 80,000 Jews living in Greece in 1942, fewer than 10,000 survived the Holocaust, and now the entire Greek-Jewish population numbers only about 5,000, mostly in Athens.

But 1,000 Jews still live in Salonika, Greece's second largest city and once the largest Sephardic community in the world. Here the Spanish Jews recreated *Sefarad* after the 1492 Expulsion and spoke their Castilian tongue, producing a vast rabbinic literature. The men, that is, but not the women, who—like many of their sisters—were kept illiterate, married off as children and confined to their homes. But despite these significant limitations, women are now the ones sustaining the vestiges of Greek Jewish culture.

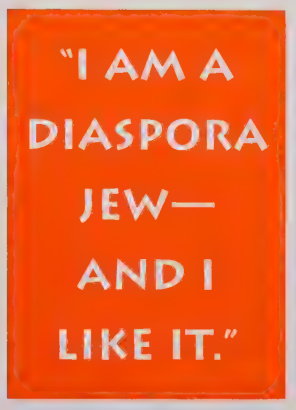
By keeping alive language, customs and cookery, generations of women were actually the upholders of Sephardic tradition—not the patriarchal rabbis with their volumes of responsa written in scholarly Hebrew. The women spoke to each other and to their children the medieval Castilian Spanish infused with Hebrew and Turkish, the delicious *Judezmo*. In this language of everyday life they transmitted stories, proverbs, songs—and, of course, recipes—in their kitchens and in the *hamam*, the Turkish bathhouses, where they performed the rites of mikvah. These women passed along such unique ceremonial dishes as *assure*, served on Tu b'Shevat: a mixture of boiled wheat, raisins, and pomegranate seeds, dating from ancient Greece, when it was offered to placate the gods. And *haroset* for Pesach from the island of Zakynthos; to invoke the bitterness of slavery this dish includes vinegar and, literally, ground brick.

In Salonika today, some highly educated women struggle to infuse these memories into a Greek culture that, tragically, tries hard to forget them. Or worse. In April, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Salonika was defaced with red paint, with which the vandals also wrote the word "Palestinians" on the pavement below. Meanwhile, in Athens, leftist students were demonstrating in front of the Israeli embassy, sporting t-shirts with the words "Fuck Israel" displayed across their chests. Current events in the Middle East have given rise to overt expressions of the anti-Semitism in Greece that is always simmering below the surface.

"I AM SPANISH," says Renée Molho (née Saltiel) proudly, a tiny, sparrow-like woman of 82 with an aristocratic bearing. She remembers, she says, her grandmother wearing the distinctive cos-

tume of Salonikan Jewish women, which included the *kofya*, a head covering that supposedly originated in Spain, and the *kapitana*, a fur-lined jacket. Renée is the matriarch of the Molho family, whose bookstore on Tzimiski Street, packed with Greek and foreign books and newspapers, has been an institution in Salonika for 113 years. Renée still goes every morning to the store, which is now run by her son Iosif. Here, she sits behind a desk piled high with books and catalogues in a multitude of languages, thumbing carefully through the pages, deciding what to order for her beloved *bibliopoleion*.

Renée Molho and I are sitting around the corner of the store at one of the many cafés in Aristotle Square, Salonika's nerve-center, filled with the endlessly-socializing Greeks taking their evening outing. She is telling me that during the war, she and her family, like some other Salonika Jews, fled to Athens, at the time under Italian administration and far more protective of Greek Jews than German-occupied Salonika. The Germans had seized the family bookstore within three days of their invasion of Salonika in 1941. Solomon Molho, whom Renée had met before the war and would later marry, escaped to the island of Skopelos, where he and his sister were hidden by Greek-Christian friends. But the rest of his family died in Treblinka. Renée escaped from Athens to Israel, where she spent the remainder of the war years, and where she received a letter from Solomon in Skopelos, asking her to marry him.



She smiles at the memory. "So after the war we returned to Salonika. *Et nous avons recommencé notre vie*." She switches back and forth between her excellent English and French, which, once upon a time, all educated Salonika Jews learned at the Alliance Israelite, one of 183 such Jewish schools based on the French system established in the Balkans and Middle East in the nineteenth century. She and Solomon married in 1946. Her husband died in 1997.

In 1944, Solomon had managed to reclaim the family bookstore, now stripped bare and debt-ridden. But little by little, she said, the two of them rebuilt their business. "We were always the most important bookstore," Renée says proudly. "After the war, all the elite gathered *chez nous*." Molho's became the de facto information center for Salonika's news-hungry population during this tumultuous time, when a bitter civil war raged in Greece. For a time the British used Molho's as their consular office.

But what did it feel like to build a life again from the ground up, to raise your children in a Salonika without Jews, a place that the survivors called "Ghost-city"?

Renée pauses. Of course, she says, it was difficult. Because I have a memory of how it was, when "everybody was Jewish."

After the war, and for years after, she says, nobody talked about those terrible times. "We only began to talk because we realized we'd better before we die."

Salonika is, always will be her home, says Renée.

"I have never felt for one minute," she says, "that the city is not mine."

HER BUSINESS CARD READS: *Dr. Rena Molho. Historian.* She is married to Mair Molho, one of the three children of Renée and Solomon; the couple have two grown children. Rena Molho studied history at Hebrew University, then in Greece at the University of Thessaloniki, finally in Strasbourg, France, where she received her Ph.D. in 1997. The book that she published based on her thesis—*The Jews of Thessaloniki, 1856–1919*—received an award from the Greek Academy. And while she doesn't hold an official university position, Rena has made it her life's work, through numerous articles, lectures, and conferences, mostly in Europe and occasionally in the U.S. as well, to make certain that the world does not forget that Salonika was once Jewish. At present she commutes every week to Athens, where for the third consecutive year she is teaching a weekly seminar at Panteios University on the history of Greek Jews. Last year, she says, her course rated first among 50, with 115 students.

Only once, she says, was she invited to lecture at a university seminar in Salonika. But it is in Salonika itself, says this tiny, dark-eyed woman of 55, where her work is most needed.

"My challenge is my city," she says. Its once-dominant Jewish presence, she says, is "the terrible secret." Schoolchildren are taught the history of Thessaloniki without any mention of the Jews, and the university history department has yet to establish a chair for Jewish studies, despite promises made at academic conferences in the presence of European and Israeli colleagues. Rena does not hesitate to publicly challenge such *de facto* anti-Semitism, both in print and on local television talk shows. Her scholarly research often leads her to facts that few dare to acknowledge: for example, she tells me that during the occupation, about 20 per cent of the Greek population of Salonika collaborated with the Nazis.

Her willingness to speak so bluntly has earned her enemies. Interestingly, she contrasts the discomfort that Salonika feels about Greek Jews with Athens, where her weekly seminar is filled to capacity. "Athens," she says, "is a different country." An essay that she contributed to a book published in France about the history of Jewish Salonika earned her insults in *Stochos*, a Greek fascist newspaper, which accused her of falsifying history by claiming that Salonika was once a Jewish city. Swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti were then spray-painted onto the Molho bookstore. A professor once remarked to her: "Come to terms with it, Rena. Salonika is not Jewish any more." Another, who was her advisor for her masters degree, in an auditorium full of academics after she had just publicly presented her thesis, told the crowd that he did not agree with her "Zionist perspective."

"I am not diplomatic," Rena says, which fact is, for her, clearly a matter of pride. Nor, she points out, does her manner go over well within Salonika's official Jewish community, who keep a low profile in a country that is 98 per cent Orthodox Christian. In 1992, for example, when the Jewish community invited Greek leaders and media to celebrate with them the 500-year anniversary of the Spanish expulsion, she objected to what she described as their slavishness.

"The Jews were kissing the hands of the Greeks," she says angrily. "The Jewish community objects to me because I refuse to compromise my integrity." Anything to do with the fact that you are a woman? I ask her.

She says not. Rather, she says, "They are intimidated by what I say." She says that she identifies as a feminist. Her take, however, is decidedly not an American one. For example, she says she is uncomfortable with women as rabbis, a status they have not achieved in Greece.

"Not that I have an objection. But it's not an issue to me. Maybe it would be, if I lived in the States." In contrast, she says,

women have the privilege of bringing up the children.

"I'm a feminist," Rena says, "when I go out on my own, unescorted. Or because I have a career, and I tell my son how to prepare breakfast. Otherwise, I tell him, no girl will marry you."

HER OFFICIAL JOB TITLE IS "executive secretary," but by all rights should be "director." Erika Perahia, 51, a sociologist who studied in Israel and France, where she raised her now-adult children, runs Salonika's new Jewish museum, which opened in May 2001.

Erika met her husband, who was born in Algeria, when she was a student in Israel. The couple moved to France in 1975. Her husband died in his early 30s, in 1980, leaving her with two young children. Erika returned to Salonika in 1999 after 21 years in France, where her children remain.

Erika is writing her Ph.D thesis about the Jewish museum, and why it is needed now. But her original topic, which she later dropped, was about the 2000 or so Salonika Jews who survived World War II. There were two distinct groups, she says, those who returned from Auschwitz, and those who hid and fought with the Greek resistance. That was, by her own admission, a difficult subject, in which she had a tremendous emotional investment: Erika, like much of her generation of Salonika Jews, is the child of concentration camp survivors.

"I HAVE NEVER FELT FOR ONE MINUTE THAT SALONIKA IS NOT MINE."

"My parents met during liberation at Auschwitz," she says matter-of-factly, sitting behind her desk at the Jewish Museum. They returned to Salonika and stayed, unlike most of the other camp survivors, who soon left for Israel and elsewhere because they could not stand living in a Salonika without Jews. One of the reasons her parents remained, Erika says, is that of her mother's family, four of the five siblings had, incredibly, survived Auschwitz. Erika and her sister, who lives in Tel Aviv, had what their Jewish friends did not: an extended family.

Her generation of Greek-Jewish children, she says, grew up very protected by the small, tight-knit Salonika community, their lives filled with Jewish youth groups and summer camps and study in Israel. In the outside world, their parents kept a low profile, so low that Greeks born in Salonika after the war did not know that there were any Jews living in their city. But in the last eight years, says Erika, the community has opened itself up, sponsoring lectures and commemorations to which they invited outsiders.

And finally, the city has a Jewish museum.

Like all children of survivors, Erika's generation suffered.

"I don't remember my parents ever telling me fairy tales. Instead, they told stories about the concentration camps," Erika says. "I was traumatized. By age 8, I refused to listen to them any more."

But now, she says, she has come to terms with her parents' past. Still, the Jewish population of Salonika is shrinking. "Young people leave, to study or work abroad. And they do not return. Those who do are special."

Like herself. "I feel a responsibility to transmit this culture. Other children of survivors feel as I do. It took us 40-plus years to assimilate all that our parents suffered. Now we try to do something with our knowledge. For example, this museum."

Does she feel at home in Salonika? "Absolutely. If I have roots at all, they are here. I am a diaspora—*galut*—Jew, and I like it. I don't belong in Israel. In Salonika, I am the transmitter of this diaspora culture."

"I FEEL EMOTIONALLY VERY CLOSE TO JEWS," says Valia Kravva, 30, who describes herself as "a Greek citizen, a Thessalonikan, an Orthodox Christian and a religious person, and at the same time a sympathizer of minority groups." When she was a child, her grandmother used to tell her stories about Jewish friends whom she had before the war. Always, says Valia, the stories ended quite abruptly with the comment: "They all went to the concentration camp." But when Valia plied her grandmother with more questions about the Jews, her grandmother, not wanting to frighten the child with the truth, only said, "Ah, some day, you'll find out."

And she did. After studying at the University of Thessaloniki, where, she says, she heard hardly any mention of the Jews, Valia pursued graduate studies in anthropology at the University of London. The title of her Ph.D. thesis? "Tell Me What You Eat and I'll Tell You If You Are Jewish: Food and Discourses of Belonging among Thessalonikan Jews."

"I wanted to write about food," Valia says, "and I needed to choose one group. I began to read about the Jews, and I instantly remembered my grandmother's stories." Valia returned to her native city, where she interviewed elderly Jews, who shared with her their memories of pre-War Thessaloniki, along with recipes like *assure*.

Her friends, she says, think that she is obsessed with her topic. "I can see it in their eyes. 'Why?' they are thinking. 'Why are you interested in *them*?'" And then this beautiful young woman smiles.

"I feel Jewish, in a sense," she says. "By writing about the Jews of Thessaloniki, I feel that I'm doing justice to one part of myself."

ASSURE
(Traditional for Tu b'Shvat)

1 lb. whole wheat kernels, soaked in water for 2 days
1 cup raisins
1 cup mixed walnuts, almonds, hazel nuts, and pine nuts, finely chopped
1 cup sugar
1 cup honey
cinnamon
confectioner's sugar
pomegranate seeds

Soak the wheat kernels for two days in an equal amount of water. Then bring them to a boil in the same water and cook until tender, about 2–3 hours. Add water if necessary, to give at least 3 cups of liquid when the wheat is cooked. Drain and reserve the liquid. Mix the wheat with the fruit and nuts in a large bowl, and add cinnamon to taste.

In a saucepan, warm the sugar, mix in the honey and about 2 cups of the wheat liquid. Dissolve the sugar over low heat and cook until a thin syrup is formed. Pour the syrup over the wheat mixture and stir in well. Set aside for about one hour, or chill in the refrigerator.

Heap in a low mound on a large serving plate. Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar and then pomegranate seeds.

Recipe and drawing from *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*
by Nicholas Stavroulakis, Cadmus Press, 1986

CLASS AND CASTE: JEWISH WOMEN OF INDIA

SARAH BLUSTAIN

FOR THE JEWS OF BAGHDAD and their descendants, of which I am one, the community exists as a weave of myth and ancient history. It is the root source for a fluid and now romanticized diaspora of Asian Jewry that spread its aristocratic culture and prosperity to Shanghai, Bombay, Basra, Calcutta, Rangoon and Singapore. It existed throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries—and continues to exist, though now as an "imagined community," as Jael Silliman calls it in her new book, *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames: Women's Narratives from a Diaspora of Hope* (Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England).

AN INDOMITABLE PATRIARCHY AFFECTS MY OWN FAMILY TO THIS DAY.

Baghdad—that is, the Baghdad that wasn't Saddam's, cloaked off from the world and menacing—no longer exists, except in the telling. My "memories" of those days are grand. Grandpa's childhood in Iraq has the glamour of a simpler time in a hot, Arab climate. It's a story of sleeping on the roof in summer, riding horses in the morning; eating foods straight from the land; speaking Arabic, French, and Hebrew; travelling with goods between Asia and the West. And Grandma, whose merchant family had transplanted to Bombay: eating tea sandwiches at The Club, shopping for lovely Indian fabrics and jewels. Not only did they do well. They did good: The Jews of Baghdad built schools, hospitals, and other institutions that to this day—long after most of the Jews are gone—still serve native populations. The diaspora of this culture is as much a club as a community, and one whose members, especially the older ones, do not let you forget. In London, a man who calls himself the "Exilarch"—the prince of the diaspora—still publishes The Scribe: The Journal of Babylonian Jewry, as if half a century had not passed.

It is this very same world that Silliman describes in her family history (though her Bagdhadi Jewish family made its diasporic home in Calcutta) through the story of four generations of women, from her great-grandmother down to herself. But Silliman's is not an ordinary memoir, filled with compassion for her forebears and curiosity about their lives. Instead, it is an exercise in post-colonial criticism—a test-case for contemporary theories on race, class, gender, and identity—the subject of which just happens to be Silliman's relatives.

They are these: Farha, her great-grandmother, who at the end of the 19th century was sent by ship from Baghdad to Calcutta to marry a man 35 years her elder. Mary, her grandmother, who was religious but also secularly educated, a teacher, among the first generation of Calcutta Jews not to have an arranged marriage, who left Calcutta for Jerusalem in 1978. Flower, Silliman's mother, who attended university in India and there became part of the youth culture celebrating Indian independence from Great Britain. And Silliman herself, who came to the United States for her higher education, has lost much connection to her Jewish and Baghdadi roots, and teaches in the Women's Studies Department at the University of Iowa.

It is clear that those women's studies help direct this retelling, Silliman's themes not far removed from the theoretical constructs of academic discourse. Her understanding of her foremothers deals with race and class, their various identifications and privileges as (sort of) white and (sort of) English in an Indian land, as Baghdadi elite, as Jews. In the most interesting turns in the book, she writes of her family members' need to confront these identities in the "moment of crisis for the Baghdadi Jewish community," when British rule ended in 1947. That was, Silliman believes, when they had to face the challenge Indian independence offered to their "multiple privileges," when they became neither white nor Indian, masters nor subjects, clinging to their Bagdhadi pedigree. Her own chapter is called, "Indian Portrait, Jewish Frame," an inversion of the book's subtitle, and is intended to show us how far she has come. She writes of her years at an American university as a "political awakening," steeped in Noam Chomsky and leftist politics, where she learned to recognize racism and class privilege, where she came to identify as a non-white South Asian and a Third World feminist. "I now mount these family portraits," she concludes, "on a much broader canvas, shifting my narrative into a dialogue with contemporary discourses on colonialism, postcolonialism, nationalism, diaspora, and identity formation for travelling communities."

What is the trouble with such distancing? Isn't that, indeed, the very purpose of scholarship? It is, and Silliman does trace fascinating arcs through different lands, economies, identities. But also it isn't—or at least it isn't alone—the purpose of scholarship. Because of those very radical transitions of place and race and class, of religious opening and feminist development, in part indeed because Baghdad and the British empire are culturally so very far away, Silliman's first task ought to have been to recreate and understand that world, to tell us what these women's lives were like, and what those lives meant—to them. There are no imaginative leaps we can make, because there is so little we know. And the polite reminiscences Silliman includes to pad out her theory are no more than shadows.

But the bigger trouble with such theoretical distancing is that it allows the author to sit in judgment of her foremothers, and not

FEMALE AND JEWISH IN BOMBAY TODAY

There's another segment of Jewish women's lives in the Indian diaspora: the Bene Israel, who have lived in India for 2,000 years. ELIZABETH MANDEL *recounts some of her experiences of a year spent working for the Joint Distribution Committee in Bombay, where 5,000 Jews live today.*

There are very significant differences between the Baghdadi community and the Bene Israel. The feeling is that the Baghdadis discriminated against the Bene Israel, who are ethnic Indians, for a variety of reasons—including social and economic class, race, and religious background. The grand synagogue in Bombay is still called the Bahgdadi synagogue; the Bene Israel did not go there. They had separate schools, separate everything.

The majority of Bene Israel are middle class, by Indian standards, and many of the women work. A lot of the girls and younger women talk about going into computers and medicine, and they looked at me like I was out of my mind when I asked if it was a struggle for females in science and technology. They don't anticipate *any* gender barriers in that area.

While the attitudes in the Jewish community are modern in many ways, some thinking is still locked in tradition. "Is it true that girls and women are not allowed inside the synagogue when they are menstruating?" I was asked shyly, but only after I had been there for almost a year. I had to have a delicate conversation about the difference between Jewish law and custom. In a recent edition of the community newsletter, however, this issue was openly addressed, possibly indicating a shift in attitude.

I held the torah for the first time in my life in India, at the Reform congregation's Simchat Torah celebration (funny that an Orthodox Jewish girl from America had to flee to India in order to hold the torah). Later, I got into a little trouble holding the torah in one of the more traditional congregations. Some young women had asked me to, saying "We don't have the courage to take the torah—it would mean a lot to us if you would."

Elizabeth Mandel

A colleague and I started a Rosh Hodesh group with encouragement from some of the women in the community, which is still going on. In Bombay, it is a women's group to which men are invited. If men are not included there are two problems. One, the women would have a hard time getting home at night. "It is neither safe nor seemly for women to be out alone at night," I was told. The second problem is that if men are not included it delegitimizes the program. So . . . it became a Rosh Hodesh program where we would talk about womens' issues and speak of the women important in the holidays coming up. It was torah study with the women, and the men sat next to them. And there was nobody saying women should not be studying torah. Still, I know some families who did not make aliyah because they were afraid of having their daughters "run crazy wild" in Israel; some sent their sons but stayed in India with their daughters for this reason. And I had teenage boys say to me "My father beats my mother all the time and I wish he wouldn't do it, but she is his wife, so what can you do?"

The vast majority—70 to 80 percent—of marriages are arranged. One shabbat we had a debate among teens about what is better, love marriage or arranged marriage. Most were on the side of arranged marriage! "You know better what you are getting into," they said. Still, many of them expressed a desire to be involved in a love relationship, perhaps another sign of changing times.

with a compassionate eye. Surely Silliman would say that I am being sentimental, would feel her book successful for challenging me to see my own relatives as they really were, privileged and key players in an "infamous and unfair triangular trade that impoverished China and India," "thriv[ing] on the underside of the colonial enterprise." And I am aware, no doubt, of the least savory sides of family history; to me, the worst of it is an indomitable patriarchy whose impact on my own family I see to this day. But there's something—does the word sound strange?—authoritarian about Silliman's analysis, and also—another strange word—Marxist. For the larger arc of her narrative is one of utopian progress from whiteness, (or at least Britishness, as her grandmother might have put it) to Indianness (the identity that Silliman has taken on, despite her actual ethnic heritage), from extreme wealth to something less than wealth, from elitism to (shall we call it) proletariatism itself.

From the get-go, Silliman reminds us of how far she has come: "Although I maintain tenuous ties with the Baghdadi Jewish diaspora community through my mother and through this act of writing, I am not part of the diaspora to which my forefathers and mothers belonged." There is in there, already on page four, echoes of the *rasha*, Passover's wicked child, who asks, what does this have to do with me? Such language is illuminating. It is condescending, and somewhat unbending. And it goes some way toward explaining why even the family analysis Silliman offers is devoid of intimacy. It is, essentially, her materialist history, its players certainly family, but more so symbols of the slow and steady erosion of privilege for which she is grateful.

SARAH BLUSTAIN is the managing editor of The New Republic.

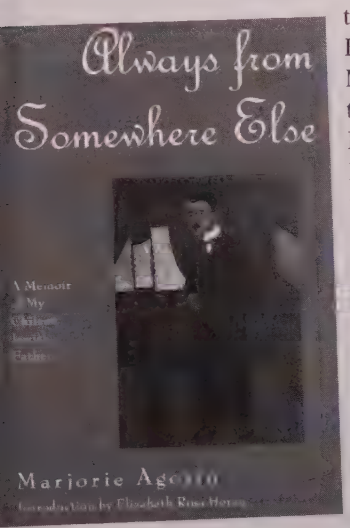
PERSECUTION & BELONGING, MEMORY & IDENTITY

JEWISH WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA

PAULETTE KERSHENOVICH

Born in Mexico, raised in the Unites States and now working on my doctorate in Israel, I was excited to read several recent books by the prolific Marjorie Agosín, whose work highlights the writing of Jewish women with roots in Latin America. These pieces discuss the boundaries of national and cultural identities, the meanings of exile and home, persecution, belonging, dual identities, postmodern exploration of "alterity," or otherness, and the ultimate search for inner peace.

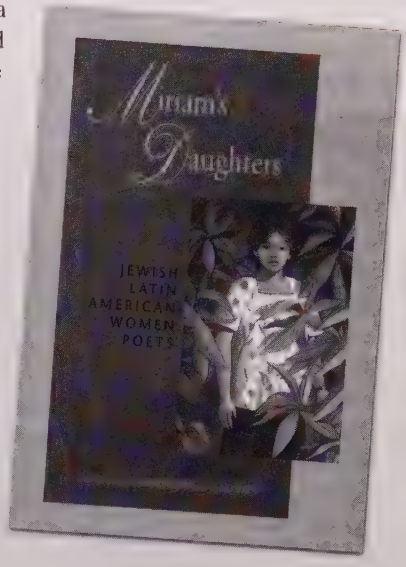
Agosín reconstructs the wanderings and travails of her family in *Always from Somewhere Else* (The Feminist Press). In the search for her father's origins, Agosín explores her grandparent's life story. Abraham (a tailor) and Raquel (a cigarette-maker) began their journey at the beginning of the 20th century when they fled the pogroms of Czarist Russia for Istanbul, crossing the Carpathian Mountains on foot. From Istanbul, they moved with their children to France (where Agosín's father, Moisés, was born) before sailing to Chile in 1922. In Chile they settled in the small town of Quillota, where they were the only Jewish family.



Despite their attempts to assimilate (Agosín's grandfather gave up speaking Russian and attending synagogue and her grandmother would only light the Sabbath candles after all the windows in the house had been covered with wrapping paper or after the curtains were drawn), Agosín's father was always considered an outsider, a stranger in his own homeland. Excluded from the private schools of the upper and middle classes, Moisés went to the public school, and eventually left Quillota in 1951 to study medicine at the National Institutes of Health at Bethesda, Maryland.

In 1955, the family returned to Santiago de Chile. However, even as a university doctor in Santiago, Moisés continued to encounter anti-Semitism and isolation. In 1968, widespread student protests and slanderous newspaper articles obliged him to close his prestigious research labs and he was forced into exile by Pinochet's dictatorship. In 1971, Moisés moved his family to Athens, Georgia and vowed never to return to Chile.

Agosín provides the reader with insight not only into Jewish life in Chile but in the Diaspora as a whole. Her intricate and vivid family history reflects the lives of so many Jews of that generation destined to be labeled as refugees and always treated like outsiders.



In *Miriam's Daughters* (Sherman Asher), Agosín brings together 29 Latin American Jewish women poets in a bilingual compilation all about the search for identity and belonging. This edition begins with Agosín's forward in which she reflects on the "Babel of whispers, songs, prayers, and languages" she experienced growing up in Chile. Agosín also reflects on Miriam as an extraordinary woman of the Bible, and a symbol of all Jewish women who have journeyed and struggled.

This compilation consists of four sections: Genealogies, Illuminations, Textures of Memory, and Jerusalem. The first section deals with an exploration of the meanings of origin and ancestry, as well as the complex lineage of Jews throughout history. The second section is dedicated to the mystical splendors of Judaism and Jewish ritual, primarily the Kabbalah, the Zohar, and to those figures from Jewish history, myth, and legend (Anne Frank, Ruth, Lilith, the Golem). The third section explores the experiences of the twentieth century and the post-Holocaust memory, and the last section ends with a song dedicated to Jerusalem.

EXILE. MIGRATION. WOMEN WRITE OF BEING UPROOTED AND DISPLACED.

The poets featured in this anthology are women from all over Latin America, hailing from Uruguay, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Brazil and Argentina. The original Spanish and Portuguese poems are printed with English translations on the facing pages, and evaluate the concepts of exile, migration, and the importance of remembering the past. This poetry reminds us that the strong voices of Jewish women transcend national and religious boundaries, and the anthology is a wonderful resource for readers interested in multiculturalism, Jewish studies, Latin American literature, or contemporary poetry.

Passion, Memory and Identity: Twentieth-Century Latin American Jewish Women (University of New Mexico Press) is another anthology compiled by Agosin that brings together women

writers from all over Latin America. These essays attempt to define and link the Jewish cultural experiences of Jewish Latin American women writers to the different countries in which they lived. The main theme is the role of memory in relation to history, identity and national cohesiveness. The writers explore their feelings of being uprooted and displaced, which is seen as part of the collective Jewish experience. The majority of these writers are second-and third-generation daughters of Sephardic or Ashkenazi immigrants who write candidly about their complex identities as Jews in predominantly Catholic countries, and the inner struggles that this entails for each of them.

PAULETTE KERSHENOVICH is a doctoral candidate in the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Her dissertation is on women in the Syrian Jewish communities of Mexico.

2 GIRLS, 2 OPPOSING JEWISH CULTURES IN MEXICO

As the title would suggest, Guita Schyfter's "Novia Que Te Vea" [*A Bride to Be*] is a film about women destined to become brides. But the primary focus of this movie's story line is not on weddings, or dating, or even romantic love. Instead, the relationship at the core of this film is the friendship between Oshinka and Rifke, two young Jewish-Mexican women who support and comfort each other through some of the most difficult decisions of their lives.

Both Rifke and Oshinka were born and raised in Mexico, and grew up in very different—but equally Jewish—families. Oshinka's Ladino-speaking grandparents immigrated to Mexico from Istambul in the 1920s; Rifke's parents are Eastern-European refugees and survivors of Hitler's Europe. Rifke's Ashkenazic upbringing is a mixture of Socialist-Zionist politics and the constant specter of her parent's traumatic past. Oshinka, on the other hand, is part of a large, loving, and close-knit Sephardic family. Her parents, grandparents, aunts, and cousins teach her songs and folk-tales in Ladino, encourage her to cook and to sew, and expect her to get married as soon as possible.

Oshinka and Rifke become close friends through the "Shomer," a Socialist-Zionist youth group. Oshinka's mother does not approve of her daughter's involvement in the group. She warns her not to become like the "Yiddishers," who, she feels, have loose morals. Rifke's mother is equally prejudiced against the Sephardic community, calling them "backward" and "ignorant."

In spite of their divergent backgrounds, what these two friends have in common is a mutual feeling of alienation arising from growing up Jewish in Mexico. Oshinka recalls children in the park accusing her and her brother of killing Jesus. Rifke remembers her parent's horror when, as a child, she begged them for a Christmas tree.

Issues of dating and marriage bring both young women into crisis with their families. Rifke is in love with a non-Jewish Mexican activist, but does not want to put her parents through anymore pain by telling them about her interfaith relationship. Oshinka cannot bear to tell her family that she does not want to marry the "perfect" boyfriend who shares their conservative values. The friends rely on one other for acceptance and support as they examine and challenge their respective backgrounds and eventually make their own surprising choices.

A MUTUAL FEELING OF ALIENATION FROM GROWING UP JEWISH IN MEXICO.

"Novia Que Te Vea" explores the tensions and benefits of cultural pluralism on a variety of levels. Director Guita Schyfter handles relationships between Jewish and Christian Mexicans, as well as those between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews, with intelligence and subtlety. This film asks many important questions: How can Mexican Jews be accepted as Mexicans, while still maintaining their ethnic and religious identities? When must you challenge your family's values, and when do you celebrate them? That the film does not give any easy answers is testament to its honesty.

RACHEL KRANSON

Available from Latin American Video Archives, 124 Washington Place, New York, NY 10014; 212-463-0108; www.latinamericanvideo.org

BEYOND BORSCHT AND BABUSHKAS

JEWISH WOMEN FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION REACH AMERICA

Growing up in Fairlawn, New Jersey, I clearly remember when the Soviet Jewish immigrants—we called them "the Russians"—moved into our small, suburban town. The Bris Avrohom synagogue—with its entrance sign in English, Hebrew, and Russian—moved into a building on Fairlawn Avenue, and Russian students joined our ranks at the Jewish high school. In a program set up through our synagogue, my own family befriended an immigrant family that moved to Fairlawn from Moldavia. In the beginning, we communicated with them in Yiddish (my mother, whose first language is Yiddish, acted as translator); as their English improved, our conversations switched to English as well.

Before 1987, when it was nearly impossible for Jews to leave the Soviet Union, we heard a lot about the Jewish community's struggle to emigrate. But relatively little has been written about the 300,000 Soviet Jews who settled in the United States after restrictions loosened. In *The Soviet Jewish Americans* (Brandeis University Press), Annelise Orleck reminds us that immigration is only the beginning of the Soviet Jewish experience in America, and she acknowledges the significance of communities like Fairlawn as distinctive homes for the new immigrants. In Orleck's words, "Alongside the poppy-seed cakes and sausages are. . . American retail shrines like The Gap and Toys R Us. . . In Fairlawn, as in many American towns of the 1990's, the urban ethnic island has been transformed into a suburban ethnic 'mall land.'" As a child of this suburban ethnic enclave, I know she's right.

Of course, the suburbs aren't the whole story. Brighton Beach, NY—Orleck's own hometown—is one of the most vibrant Soviet Jewish urban enclaves in America. With its Russian groceries, restaurants, and gilded nightclubs, Brighton Beach has a distinctly Soviet Jewish feel. For this community, Brighton has taken on the kind of symbolism that the Lower East Side of Manhattan had for an earlier group of Jewish immigrants to America.

Orleck also highlights the diversity within the Soviet Jewish community. While most Soviet immigrants hail from Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine, those who have settled in Forest Hills, Queens come from the Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, and Kazakhstan. These Bukharan Jews, as they are called, speak a variety of Persian that is mixed with Hebrew words and written in Hebrew characters. And unlike their Western Soviet counterparts, the Bukharan community was very religious in the Soviet Union and remains so in the United States. Since there are very few Jews left in Uzbekistan, Forest Hills is currently one of the most important centers of Bukharan Judaism in the world.

Gender, age and education affect the way each immigrant adapts to a new life. Orleck finds that women immigrants tend to find work more quickly than men do, primarily because they are more willing to accept lower-paid, lower-status jobs. (As of 1996, the average hourly wage for men was $9.75 per hour, while women earned $7.00.) And while the loss of professional status has been a problem for many well-educated Soviet immigrants, gender bias in the United States job market makes the loss even more severe for women. Gender prejudice is particularly apparent in the case of the many women immigrants trained as pediatricians, since pediatrics was considered "woman's work" in the Soviet Union. Of all the immigrant doctors, female pediatricians have been the least successful at reviving their careers in the United States.

GENDER AFFECTS HOW YOU ADAPT TO A NEW LIFE.

Violence plays a role in the lives of many families under stress. While Orleck gives no specific statistics on domestic abuse in Soviet Jewish families, she does cite anecdotal evidence that spousal abuse is a severe problem for Soviet Jewish immigrants. She recounts the tragic story of Galina Komar, a Soviet immigrant killed by her abuser in 1996 *after* filing a report to the police; in this respect American courts can be just as impotent as Soviet ones in protecting women from violence.

On the plus side, what Soviet Jews in America have in common is a cultural identity that is lively and complex—the rich product of many powerful influences. Immigrant institutions like the International Children's Center for the Performing Arts in Brooklyn teach songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian and English. Lavish bat and bar mitzvahs celebrate the immigrants' financial success in America, as well as their newfound freedom to express their Judaism proudly and publicly. They have formed vigorous immigrant cultures that are profoundly shaped by their country of origin, deeply Jewish (if not, in all cases, religious), and quintessentially American. As one young immigrant notes, "What I went through when I came here has made me what I am. . . I'm Soviet Jewish and American somehow. I'm all of those things."

RACHEL KRANSON

The Wedding Photographer's assistant

A short story by ILANA STANGER

"I CAN'T STAND A BRIDE WHO WON'T WEAR WHITE," Lydia told Dina, flipping through show albums with well-manicured hands. "Watch how these brides cast space—how that dress makes her stand apart, almost above the crowd. When a bride's not in white it's impossible to follow her; she becomes just another woman, she disappears on the dance floor."

Dina wanted to respond that it was exactly the role of a white wedding dress to make women disappear, but stopped herself.

"There's no question about white. If they ask me I tell them, 'That's it, we're not even discussing this.'"

Dina nodded solemnly. She didn't mention what she'd said to Andrea the night before, while debating whether to leave the world of temp agencies for that of wedding photography. "The thing is," Dina had told her, "I hate weddings. It's all such rehearsed, performed happiness. Photography should be about capturing something real and true—real emotion, real despair."

"Dina," Andrea said, "you're the least romantic person I know. For you to be a wedding photographer is too hilarious to pass up."

Dina had grinned, immediately liking this smart, tough image. For months she'd been waking up anxious, aware of all she had not yet accomplished; successes other women her age, just a few years out of college, had already achieved: connections made, awards won, future plans secured. Finally, she'd have her own impressive story to tell.

She could see herself in a hip bar laughing about weddings, cynical and sharp.

She could see herself sitting in a hip bar with some tall boy, laughing about the weddings, cynical and sharp.

Lydia closed a white leather-bound album, looked up at Dina.

"These pictures," she told her, gesturing to the brides blushing past their dark wood frames, "will never hang in a museum. But they'll be treasured more than those museum photos could ever be. There's an old Jewish saying, 'Every time a man takes a wife, a new world is created.' These photographs are the first images of that new world."

Dina quickly learned that Lydia's lecture was repeated to every anxious pair who came to the studio. Her first day on the job she ate cake and sipped coffee while Lydia showed the albums to a young couple. The bride twisted thin dark hair around her finger; the groom turned pages dutifully. Lydia told them how those albums would accompany them on future family picnics, how their children would clamor to see 'Mommy and Daddy's wedding album.' Dina was surprised to see both the groom and his bride smile shyly. All the talk of future and children and love; it felt too heavy a promise for the tiny suburban shop.

Dina wanted to laugh it off—who brings wedding albums on picnics? Yet watching the couple shift in their seats, earnestly flipping through albums filled with photographs: the first dance cast in a pink light, close-up of the best man offering his toast, aerial view of the bride throwing the bouquet, she felt only a confusion of superiority and shame.

From the beginning Lydia allowed Dina to photograph the weddings on her own. Dina always aimed for the outtakes—the moments when the bride reached for the lip balm or the groom nervously combed back his hair with a still unringed hand and everyone made small jokes and traded compliments. Lydia's only rule was that Dina had to stay out of the way. Dina, who tended toward quiet observation in most social situations, was particularly good at that.

What surprised Dina, though, was how the weddings made her weep.

It was exactly like cutting an onion.

She would begin the wedding thinking this is fine, I feel fine, this can't possibly make me cry. But somewhere along the way she'd find it cut too deeply, and the tears would come. At one wedding it was the father kissing his daughter before the altar, the way

he held her arm gently between them. At another it was the couples' first clumsy dance as husband and wife—they had turned so slowly, clung so tightly to each other.

The weddings were so joyful and yet so sad. Had her own parents once been this way—turning white circles on a parquet floor, arms closed seriously about each other—before the divorce, before the photographs of her father in California, running the sprinkler on another woman's lawn?

The earnestness of the event, the dogged determination to declare true love in suburban catering halls, broke her heart every time.

Dina had worked for three weeks, six weddings, when Rachel arrived for her appointment, solo. Dina immediately noted her beauty—tall and thin with perfect waves of long black hair and a wide, serious smile—and her confidence. Most of the brides felt Lydia was judging their relationship, which of course she was, and would drag their fiancés in and caress them through the album-gazing process, but Rachel just said, unapologetically, "I left him at our place in New York. He couldn't care less about this, and someone had to stay and walk the dog." Rachel, on the other hand, had definite opinions about wedding photography. "No colored lights," she said. "No phony backdrops, no throwing the bouquet, no photographs of me looking into a mirror or contemplating my ring finger. I will not fix my father's boutonnière or allow my mother to brush my hair. Okay?"

Lydia nodded and poured more coffee. Dina beamed.

The wedding was in only two weeks. The previous photographer—Rachel's close friend —had just been given an opportunity to accompany a biological expedition to Bolivia. It impressed Dina that Rachel knew those kinds of people, said things like, "it was an offer she couldn't refuse," even if she was marrying in suburban Philadelphia.

Wedding mornings Dina usually woke up later than she'd intended, instantly tense. She'd rush to the studio to quickly review names, family relations, and requests for special pictures with Lydia over donuts and coffee. But on the morning of Rachel's wedding, the first Sunday in August, Dina awoke early, strangely excited. She even dressed up: a new blue silk shirt, along with eyeliner, mascara, and lipstick.

It was a hot, humid, gray day; they took the formal shots under the thin shade of two tall sycamore trees. "Bride, groom, just the two of you now. Smile." "Dina—fix the veil, yes, like that, so it swirls more." "Okay, turn slightly to the left and hold that, perfect." Rachel's dress was a soft cream color, curved close around her breasts and hips. Her groom was tall and thin and looked as though he would cry from joy, but kept laughing instead. Rachel's mother said "honey," every five words; her father was a fat pink man who clapped everyone on the back and danced around between pictures, practicing the steps he and his wife had rehearsed in class.

For the first time, Dina managed to get the photograph of the father kissing his daughter at the end of the aisle. A good shot; she felt it when she took it.

The dancing began directly after the hors d'oeuvres. The band played Hava Nagila, two concentric circles formed, and Rachel and her mother, linking arms, spun around the center of the inner circle. The guests shined, then sweated, as the music moved them faster. Someone brought two chairs and a small group gathered to lift Rachel and her husband above the crowd. Like make-believe royalty they rose, each clenching the chair with one pale knuckled hand and a white napkin, buoyed up between them, with the other. The guests continued to dance circles around them.

Dina stood on a chair to get the picture, and stayed there while guests lifted up the groom's parents and then the bride's. She photographed Rachel's father as he stepped off the chair; he swayed, his face moist with sweat and his smile strained. Something in his expression made her pause with her finger above the shutter button, but then he took the hand of his wife, continued dancing.

When Dina looked over again the father had paused. He was clapping, but his eyes looked distant and his face red. Still, his smile was so sincere that Dina photographed him. And then again, because he was holding his chest. And then again, because he went, impossibly, from red to ash gray. And then again, as someone cried, "Give him space!" and he crumpled to the ground in his tuxedo and curled around the pain.

Several women ran for their purses, fished out cell phones with nervous hands. Two guests, transforming back into doctors, stepped forward and barked orders: "Stand back, remain calm!" The older doctor, gray hair at his temples, bent down to the father, spoke loudly: "Are you okay? Can you hear me?" Barely pausing to listen to the silence the doctors rolled Rachel's father onto his back, four arms wrapping round his body, pulling him flat like a carpet.

Dina focused her lens while the older doctor bent his ear to the father's nose and mouth, watched the still chest with a creased forehead. Dina checked the light meter as he placed two fingers on the father's neck, paused, frowned. As he tipped back the father's head, opened the mouth and breathed—one, two—into the body, Dina took a picture. Then another and another while the younger doctor crouched over the chest, locked her elbows over the heart and began pumping—one, two, three, four, five. Pause. One, two, three, four, five. Pause. Again. Pause, two breaths, check pulse. Repeat.

By the time the paramedics arrived—five, ten minutes later; Dina wasn't thinking of time—the guests had grouped themselves into small whispering circles. Most tried to watch while pretending not to look, a few brought over water, juice. Dina photographed Rachel and her mother kneeling on the floor, holding each other, the untouched glasses lined up beside them.

The paramedics lifted the body onto the gurney and rubbed the defibrillators together. Electric currents searched for the

heart; the body heaved while they quickly pushed it out the door. Dina captured Rachel's mother as she stumbled to touch the father's hand; Rachel stayed near the moving gurney while her new husband pressed ahead, seeking out doors to open, ways to help.

The catering staff slunk into the kitchen. The hall manager spoke with two policemen in the doorway, assured them that everything had been done properly. The guests remained in the room, devastated. At one table a woman sat with her head in her hands, sobbing; Dina photographed the woman's pale face behind her clasped-hand veil. Dina moved softly round the room, drawn to the way those left behind touched each other, knowing death had claimed someone from among them.

If the guests noticed her they ignored her; she was camouflaged in the confusion. But Lydia, who had been waiting in the lobby for Dina to join her, was horrified to find Dina roaming about, taking pictures. With a strong arm Lydia led Dina from the room, as if she'd disciplined generations of errant photographers. Without speaking, she drove Dina home. In the car Dina rewound the roll and removed it, pressing it safe to her stomach. She left the camera on the seat when she got out. "Give me the film," Lydia said. Dina shook her head no, and fled into her apartment.

Dina read the obituary in the paper the next morning. Rachel's father had been a successful car salesman, owned three suburban dealerships, and served on the local school board. "He is survived," the paper read, "by his wife, Rose Levine, his daughter, Rachel Levine, and her husband, Mathew Loeb."

In another section the wedding announcement: "Rachel Levine, daughter of Rose and Arthur Levine, was married yesterday to Mathew Loeb." How many people, she wondered, would connect the two, call over coworkers to shake their heads at the horror of it?

Dina developed the film, bit her lip to keep from grinning.

She brought the photos to a local gallery. "Tell me they're faked," the director said. When Dina shook her head no he whistled low, then offered her a group show in October.

Dina found a job with the Philadelphia mural commission. She met with painters and community residents, reviewed mural proposals, photographed the painting process. The job took her to neighborhoods all across the city; she brought her camera on each assignment. Returning home from work each evening she'd survey her apartment, third floor of a red brick row house, bathed in yellow early autumn light. She felt like a character in a movie: young, urban, talented.

And then, three and a half months after the wedding, Rachel called.

"How are you?" Dina asked, too loudly, too strained.

Rachel ignored the question. When Lydia had paid a shiva call, Rachel told her, she said that she would have Dina destroy the wedding photographs.

"I've thought about it since," said Rachel. "Do you still have them?"

Dina paused. She could lie, say no, and pray that Rachel never saw the images. But Dina couldn't lie. "Yes," she answered, "I have them."

"Good," said Rachel. "I want to see them."

Dina didn't think to protest—this wasn't her obligation, her responsibility. Yes, yes of course Rachel could see them.

"I'm back in New York now," Rachel told her, "and I don't have time to go home this month, but I could meet you halfway, if that's alright, at one of those rest stops off the Jersey turnpike. This weekend sound okay?"

Hanging up the phone Dina placed her arms on the table, her head in her arms. When she'd looked back on that afternoon, days and weeks and now months later, she couldn't answer for why she'd done it. Why hadn't she put down her camera, showed respect for the dying? Even Andrea had been shocked to see the pictures. "Dina, you didn't, you couldn't have. . . " she'd said, while Dina had hoped her flushed skin looked like shame rather than the pride she felt. "It was," Dina told her, "just too good a picture. I couldn't resist, I just couldn't."

"No throwing the bouquet, no photographs of me looking into a mirror or contemplating my ring finger."

Dina pulled into the Mollie Pitcher rest stop that Sunday at noon. The sky and the parking lot were the same shade of gray; the wind stirred paper cups and plastic straws in small circles. Outside the rest stop cars were lined up for gas; inside were the usual stores, arranged over brown tile: a coffee pavilion that almost looked like Starbucks; a Roy Rogers and a Home Country Cooking; a store that sold automobile products, souvenirs, sunglasses, and candy. Dina found Rachel seated at a red table next to a large window, watching for her. They smiled at each other and Dina sat down, placing her green canvas bag on her lap.

Rachel spoke first. "Listen," she said, "I want to see them. I don't know why, but I do."

Dina nodded, suddenly important, a real photographer on a grave mission.

"No one knows I'm here. Not even my husband. But I've felt it's so unreal—maybe everyone always feels that, but I'd looked forward to that wedding so damn long and then it was, stolen, you know?"

Dina nodded again, noticing the dark of Rachel's eyes.

"So I thought, that since you had these pictures and I had no real memory of the whole thing happening, that if I saw them..."

Dina reached into her canvas bag. She pulled out a manila

envelope and pushed it across the table toward Rachel. "You can keep them if you want to," she said, half-standing up.

Rachel placed her hands on the envelope, looked up at Dina. "No, stay. Please stay," Rachel said. "I don't think I can do this alone."

Dina sat down. She kept her hands clasped quietly on the table, crossed her legs to keep still.

Rachel carefully unwound the thread that held the envelope closed. Dina felt Rachel's eyes on her, but kept her own head turned to the window, watched a young girl in a yellow jumpsuit run after her father, try to reach the car first.

Rachel pulled out a stack of photos. She took a long time to lower her eyes to look, but, when she did, she smiled at the picture of her kissing her three year old cousin. It wasn't the wide, perfect smile Dina had seen before. It was a sad smile, slightly wavering.

"Oh," Rachel said. Tears came to her eyes. "Oh."

Dina's hands stirred when she saw Rachel cry. She could have stroked her face, but placed her hands flat on the table instead.

The next picture was of Rachel and her husband, discussing something intently during a short photo break. The next of her motioning to her mother, "Over here, come join us." Her mother was shading her eyes from the sun.

The procession began. Here was the groom between his mother and his father, all three delighted and tense. The groom's brother with his wife: she, six months pregnant, one hand on her stomach. Pairs of friends, arms linked, smiling down the aisle. And then Rachel herself, veiled, one parent on each side.

Rachel looked for a long time, a small wrinkle forming between her brows, her hair tucked behind her ears. "I haven't seen any pictures," she said. "Guests who brought cameras didn't send the film over, and I didn't want to see Lydia's. But I knew yours would be different." She reached toward Dina's hand, gently, but absently, covering it with her own.

Dina felt the touch inside; kept still. But Rachel drew lightly away, returned to the photographs.

She brought the photos to a gallery. "Tell me they're faked," the director said.

Rachel's father lifted her veil and kissed her cheek.

"I want to frame this one," Rachel said, holding the photo with both hands. "Is that wrong? It's what I have."

Dina smiled. "I think that's okay," she told her, "I think you can do that."

Under the wedding canopy Rachel turned seven circles around her groom. Each sipped wine out of a silver cup, recited vows, placed gold bands upon pale fingers. The rabbi read the wedding contract aloud; the groom smashed the glass; the bride and groom embraced.

Rachel smiled as she looked through them, and Dina ached to see that sadness.

There was Rachel, held up on a chair, grinning, linked to her husband by a white napkin.

And then there were her parents, red faced and laughing, doing the same.

Rachel paused. Looked up at Dina. Again the bright, steady eyes.

"Have you shown these to anyone?" she asked.

Dina nodded.

"Which picture is the most, you know, tough?"

Dina fished a picture out from the pile. A man was lying on the floor. Above him, a woman was screaming and clinging to a bride. A blur in the corner was the doctors rushing to the scene. The woman's eyes were on the body, the bride's on the doctors.

"I thought they would save him," Rachel said. "But I shouldn't have looked away."

She went in reverse now, back to the beginning of the death. And then forward, to the place where the paramedics came and he disappeared.

"He was dead when they arrived at the hospital," Rachel said, now staring so intently that Dina found it difficult to return the gaze, longed to blink away the intimacy. "He was dead right there," pointing to a picture. "That's my father dead. I can't believe it—all those cliché things—he looks as if he's asleep."

Rachel walked Dina to her car, gave her back all the pictures except the few of the ceremony. They stood for a moment, looking at each other. The wind lifted strands of Rachel's hair across her face, and Dina, without thinking, brought her fingers up to brush them away. And then Rachel was catching Dina's hand in her own, and then holding it. They stood another moment like that, while Dina's mouth went dry. Rachel dipped forward, placed her other hand around the back of Dina's head, pulled Dina toward her.

Dina was just recognizing Rachel's scent—something soapy, familiar—when Rachel drew back, kissed Dina quickly, and then stepped away, smiling. She stroked Dina's hair a few times; her eyes were red.

"Thank you." Rachel said, her car keys clutched in one hand and the photos in the other. "These . . . " she lifted them up, paused. "They give me something of my father back." Her voice was just a little high with sadness. "Thank you so much for that." Rachel lifted a hand goodbye, then walked away.

Dina leaned against her car. She waited two, five minutes. It grew colder, windier.

She wrapped her arms around herself, feeling warm despite the weather, and grinned.

ILANA STANGER is currently earning a Masters in Fiction at Temple University, where she holds a University Fellowship. An earlier version of this story appeared in The Bellevue Review.

THINK TANK

From Privilege to Poverty... What I learned in the move

BY ERICA KATSKE

I spend most of my work time on a campaign to increase public funding for after-school programs. These programs are necessary to young people's academic success and personal development. So why doesn't every public school offer a quality after-school program?

The answer involves power—those who depend on after-school programs haven't wielded enough power to influence city, state and federal budget decisions. As an organizer, I understand power in two ways: organized people and organized money. We all know how organized money works—individuals or businesses use money to influence decisions to reflect their self-interest. Most individuals and communities don't have enough money to move their interests, but they are not powerless. When they are organized, people use different kinds of power—numbers, votes, the media and more.

Who holds power in the Jewish community?

My job as an organizer is to help figure out ways to turn up the volume on the voices of those who are fighting for social, racial, economic and environmental justice in their/our/my communities. I encourage people to speak out about their experiences, and I spend a lot of time listening. In my work, I think about power constantly—my campaign's power, my community's power, my own power.

Living through my parents' violent divorce, I began to struggle with issues of power from the time I was very young. Lawyers, social workers and police were major players in my life from the time I was 5 years old until I left for college at age 18. I grew up thinking that all young people dreaded going home at the end of the school day. While most children turned to their parents and communities for protection, I carried around a police detective's business card "in case I needed anything".

Most of my friends seemed to enjoy participating with their families in synagogue events. I grew up feeling like my family was an embarrassment to our congregation. At the rabbi's suggestion, I had two bat mitzvah services because my parents refused to be in the same room with one another. As a result of the chaos that my coming of age caused, my younger sister and brother decided they didn't want a Jewish education.

While I did manage to find allies in teachers and friends through the worst of those years, my family and friends strongly encouraged me not to share my experience. My parents explained that there was no need to bring attention to myself, especially if it meant becoming a focus for people's pity. My friends' parents worried about me disrupting their children's "healthy" childhoods with stories about my "unhealthy" family. Living through my parents' divorce taught me that even those I love and trust can use power irresponsibly, most of the time without thinking about it.

Growing up in my particular family also taught me about the link between money and power. My father is a wealthy and established surgeon. Until I was 5, my mother was a stay-at-home mom. After the divorce, and losing my father's financial support in court, my mother struggled to find a job that would support three children. For the first part of my childhood, I lived primarily with my father. I went to private school, had a catered bat mitzvah party at a large hotel, went on exotic vacations and had access to my own car at 16. But these gifts came with larger-than-life expectations of success, loyalty and silence. My father had been a flawless student—I was to follow in his footsteps, even if it meant keeping a distance from my friends and coming home directly after school every day to study. I was told I was my father's "special little girl," much more like him than like my mother, who was unpredictable, unreliable and an alcoholic. (I knew she drank a lot, but so did he. Was this accusation true?) We had a secretly close relationship (I was the "chosen" child, the one who understood him). But that relationship left me feeling burdened, alone and guilty.

I had been given the power to arrange my own custody schedule, but had never dared to use it. When I was 16, it seemed a viable option for leaving my father's house. One night, after everyone else had gone to sleep—my father often stayed up late watching television and drinking—I simply said to him, "I want to talk about changing my custody schedule to spend more time with my mother before I go to college." I got the reply that I had feared: "If you do that, don't come back."

I left the next morning with a bag of clothes and a hand-

ful of things that were important to me. I moved to my mother's apartment in the city. Like my mother, I had my father's financial support pulled out from under me. I did odd jobs at my private high school as part of a makeshift financial aid package that administrators designed to keep me at the school. I worked after school and during the summers to help pay my living and school costs. I struggled with grant and loan applications and juggled several jobs to finance college. Through all this my mother and I fought endlessly about what we could and could not afford. She craved a different lifestyle than the one she was living, while I was more than happy to leave the pain of my privileged life behind.

While in college, I began to understand the role that class and power played in my life. I had a private high school education and the manners and mannerisms of an upper class woman. My financial reality, however, was very different; my tuition was heavily subsidized with grants, loans and work-study programs. I spent all of my spare hours working in my dorm's kitchen, cleaning dishes and serving meals. My closest friends were the other students who worked in the kitchen, and the full-time kitchen staff. I discovered that I couldn't relate to students who didn't have to work, didn't know how to clean up after themselves and took their time and place at the college for granted. I learned that if I spoke up about what it felt like to be a low-income person at an elite, private college, I found other students who felt similarly and who also thought they were alone. As I connected to others and as we began to talk openly about our experience, we found students and staff on campus who were willing to listen. Building these connections helped me feel more powerful.

. . . What it was like to be poor at an elite, private college

And then there's the Jewish world. My experience growing up in two (equally Jewish) social classes has made me realize how class plays out in the Jewish community. As an activist and feminist, I am committed to initiating the conversation about class, wealth and power that I didn't have growing up. So far, that commitment has meant continuing to tell my story despite the discomfort I feel and the discomfort it may create for listeners. For example, when I was invited to speak to the Jewish Funders Network as a leader of the rising generation, I used my time to talk about how my family history has shaped my relationship to money, power and the Jewish community. I described how having or not having money at different points of my life affected my vision of how our community can use power justly and more consciously. I invited participants to begin to discuss their own stories around class and to think about how deeply power dynamics created by money (or lack of money) affect us all.

The conversation I envision begins with acknowledging the class diversity in the Jewish community and recognizing the wealth and resources available to our community as a whole. We need to acknowledge our privilege, and then talk about how we navigate it, think about it, and use it.

When we assume or allow others to assume that all Jews are affluent, white and heterosexual, we are using power. When we build Jewish schools that provide expensive educational experiences only to children in our community, we are using power. When we allow Jewish businesses and organizations to employ workers—both Jewish and non-Jewish—at less than a living wage and without offering them benefits, we are using power.

The conversation needs to be informed by the history of social class in America so that we can think about how the American Jews can use their relatively recent privilege in more humane ways. As Jews—and Jewish women—enter the ranks of the power elite, we need to think about how we can "do" upper class differently than we've seen it done in this country. Throughout American history, class power has been used to separate (geographically and institutionally) communities with wealth from communities without wealth. We need to learn to use our class power to insure that these communities are integrated and to democratize decision making.

The conversation needs to include those who have not traditionally had decision-making power in our community: Jewish women; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning Jews; Jews by choice and their children; working class and low income Jews; Jews of color; non-Jews (especially those of color) who work in Jewish organizations and agencies; single Jewish parents; Jews single by choice. If this dialogue is to reflect the true diversity of our community, every one of our (amplified) voices is necessary.

Michael Datikash

ERICA KATSKE is the New York City Organizer for the Coalition for After-School Funding, a project of Citizen Action of New York.

David Blumenfeld, a tourist, was returning from prayers at the Western Wall in 1986 when a member of the rebel faction of the PLO, a hidden gunman, fired one shot at him and fled. The bullet tore across Rabbi Blumenfeld's skull but fortunately did no permanent damage. Fifteen years later, his daughter, Laura Blumenfeld, a Washington Post reporter and widely published journalist, decides to spend her honeymoon year in Jerusalem with a not-so–secret-agenda: to track down her father's attacker, to try to understand his life and to have him understand how his shot altered the life of her family.

Laura visits the assailant's family several times without revealing her personal connection to the event. One day she receives a letter the gunman has written to her from prison.

Is the Hope for Peace a Delusion?

BY LAURA BLUMENFELD

I broke the seal of the plastic capsule. Unwound the thread that bound the letter. Rubbed the string between my fingers and sniffed. Day-old spit.

His note began with a warning. Prison guards were cracking down. We had to watch what we wrote, he said. I should "stay far from the main subject." I wondered what he thought our main subject was.

Then his tone relaxed:

It is a great news, dear Laura, that you visited the sea of Ashkelon, and you have enjoyed a good time. I wounder how the sea looks like now. I haven't seen it more than 15 years. But I do feel its presence, mostly when I do stand out at the coridor looking at the old city of Ashkelon and smelling the breeze coming out of the sea. I used to close my eyes for seconds and dive into imagination, while the taste of the sea are being smelled by my weak lungs. How great is the feeling that gets me escape out of the prison far away from the darkness for a few seconds.

On the coming dayes, I'll be travelling to Barzili hospital at Ashkelon to have some medical tests for my lungs. I hope passing near the sea that I could see it. Concerning my health, still things are going so bad to a degree of touching the different faces of death many times. I have felt how beautiful is life and how great are its meanings. I do believe that life is fighting for me. It doesn't want to ignor me, or turn its back on me. I'm her great present, how could she leave me!?

I have many things to do if I do win getting back to life. I have learned many things through this long journey of mine. I have learned to believe in my princibles, and to respect the holyness of others lives. People are so different when you get to know them from near.

That last line jumped from the page. Exactly! I thought. That, more or less, was my philosophy of journalism, if not of life. We were all more alike than different.

I've known some people from near, and discovered how different they are especially when you feel, and understand their hopes, and needs, their true humanity. We need to believe in peace between peaples. We need to give and forgive to find ourselves living a true life.

At this stage, I'm working so hard to finish my studies, so when I do get released, I could find my place of work at the field of diplomacy where I could work for the benefit of introducing mutual international issues such as the universal peace issues and the introducement of economical cooperation between peoples of the world. I hope I could take part in shapping the new history of the Middle East . . .

Everything he had written so far looked promising. *He will apologize. He must. Even if he doesn't mean it, I'll believe it because I want to.* If for no other reason than that, I did not know what to do next.

For the sake of answering your questions, I've told you, what I've done is not personal. You have to see it as part of our leagal military conduct against the occupation. Occupation knows no justice. We learned it to be a duty to fight the aggresor. Land, in our believes, is a holy main thing we are ready to die for.

If the Israelian people could forget and forgive the Nazis for what they done for them, we could forgive them for the occupation to our land-a thing that can't be imagined . . .

With concern to "David Bloomingfield"—

Illustration: "Memorias" by Liliana Wilson Gretz

My eyes had skipped over the line about the Nazis to my father's name. The shooter had never mentioned my father's name before. No one in his family had.

—"David Bloomingfield"— I hope he could understand the reasons behind my act. If I were him I will. I have thought a lot of meeting him one day. We have been in a state of war and now we are passing through a new stage of historical reconciliation where there are no place for hatred and detestation. Under this new era and atmosphere, he is welcome to be my guest in Jerusalem.

I hope, Laura, you too could be there. You could believe that God loves us both. Me for leading my act and having me shoot him just one shoot, and him for having his injured lightly. We are both children of God, and he probably knew how to take care of us.

Dear Laura, feel free to ask any questions you want. You are not overwhelming me with your queries. The fact is that I've little time to concentrate on what I write you . . . . time passes so fast, I hope the day will not end, so that I could work and work.

My family do love you and keep on telling me about you on their visits to me, Feel free and open when you're with them. . . .

with my best wishes to you,
Omar

My eyes misted. *Yes! He's sorry.* He acknowledged his wrongdoing. He accepted responsibility for his act. There was no longer a need for revenge.

I called Rachel and read her the letter, looking forward to gloating.

"I had a chill," she said when I finished the last line. "He sounds like you. It's a UNICEF letter. Maybe this whole thing is a joke on you. He's saying what you want to hear. Maybe he's like, 'Ugh, this journalist is writing me again.' He's telling his cellmates, 'You write the first page and I'll write the third page.'"

He *will* apologize. He must. Even if he doesn't mean it, I'll believe it because I want to.

Rachel was voicing one of my unspoken fears. Maybe he was playing with me. Tricking the trickster.

"Still, he says he's sorry," I said.

"He's *not* sorry. He's worse than not sorry. He thinks there's nothing to be sorry about." She quoted his latter back to me: " 'I hope he could understand the reasons behind my act. If I were him I will.'"

As she spoke, I was thinking about the downside of having smart friends.

"He's saying"— she said a little too loudly—"I don't owe him an apology because what I did was OK. That's a more extreme form of not being sorry. Ha! I was right. He's not sorry at all."

Rachel was right. I had misread his letter.

"You don't think he believes in peace?" I said.

"He's saying 'peace,' but that's pragmatic, not a change of heart. There's a peace song playing now, so he's an asthmatic, poet, philosopher-politician who believes in humanity. But if the music changes and peace negotiations fail, he'll become a lion-warrior again. It's that tribal thing, that Mafia thing, 'it's nothing personal.' Then *bang*—he shoots you."

"It's disingenuous to say your father was just walking in the market, minding his own business. He's a Jew; his collective group is guilty."

"Shoots an innocent man?"

"It's disingenuous to say your father was just walking in the market, minding his own business. He's a Jew; his collective group is guilty."

"I don't believe that. I believe in reconciling individuals."

"That's so American. Everyone doesn't have to be friends."

"But that's the whole point of me: 'Let's all be friends.'"

"Then you shouldn't be playing in the Middle East. In the Middle East people just look across fences and grimace. People aren't friends in the rest of the world. It's sort of cute that you believe the whole world works that way. It's all brave men and pretty women, and good triumphs. It's a joke."

My head was aching.

"This is not about the heart of an individual," she said.

"I'm going to prove you're wrong."

Baruch had come home and climbed to the roof.

"You OK?" he said.

I shook my head no.

He mouthed the words *I love you*, and retreated.

I said to Rachel, "Can't the personal overcome the collective?"

"So what, then—you'll see the shooter in court, and you'll fall in love and you'll have intertribal children? And he'll say, 'Did you take prenatal vitamins?'"

I could not keep up with her when she was on a tear.

"You know," I said, hoping to slow the fight, "we're trying to make him more like ourselves. We're projecting onto him, as if he's a figment of our imagination. I want him to be a dreamy idiot. And you want him to be like you—a tribal cynic."

"But I'm the one in touch with reality. He doesn't regret shooting your father, and he never will. How are you going to deal with it?"

I decided to stop calling Rachel.

Reprinted with permission from *Revenge: A Story of Hope* by Laura Blumenfeld. Simon & Schuster, 2002.

The Groom

A short story by
AMY KOPPELMAN

My best girlfriend wants to fuck her riding instructor.

I say, "Really Sam, you'll be a cliché."

She says, "I know, but I love him."

I order an egg-white omelet, she orders fries for her one year old daughter who is with us and a diet coke for herself.

"You know," I say, "horseback riding is dangerous."

"He'll protect me."

I think she is heavy with the ketchup but the little girl takes the fries okay.

"Protect you how?"

Sam leans across the table. "He makes me feel safe."

"And Barry doesn't make you feel safe?"

"It's different. This guy doesn't let me fall."

"That's his job."

"You don't understand." She looks at her kid, second kid, no words yet.

"What don't I understand?"

"It's more that you don't remember."

"Don't remember what?"

"Don't remember what it's like to be in love."

We drop her kid off and I go with her to her shrink crosstown, a psychoanalyst on Central Park West.

"This is a fantasy."

I watch Sam pick at her cuticles.

"You have to ask yourself what this guy offers you and figure out how to get it from your marriage."

"Barry doesn't like riding that much."

"It's not about riding."

"I know." This is what Sam says whenever she's not paying attention.

We are on out way home, the park is crowded, nice day.

"He told me that my eyes are the color of a chestnut mare."

"And you think you're the first girl he's said that to?"

"Yes."

"How can you think that?"

"I know him."

"You don't know him. If you knew him you'd know that his shit smells just like Barry's."

"That's not the point."

"What's the point then?"

"The point is that I don't care if his shit smells."

"That's only because you haven't smelled it yet."

I leave her at her awning, she lives on Fifth, I live on Park, that part all worked out.

I give her a hug. "You have everything to lose." I am surprised by how desperate my voice sounds.

She pulls back, looks down at me, "I know." This is what Sam says whenever she doesn't care.

We meet every Tuesday for lunch. Nine years, lunch every Tuesday.

"He called me from a pay-phone."

"What did he say?"

"He said so far so good." Her little girl is picking at broken bits of a grilled cheese sandwich.

"So far so good?"

"He's meeting me in Montana."

"You're going to ruin your life Sam."

"No I'm not."

"Yes you are." I watch her heavy with the ketchup again.

"He has a kid too."

"That makes it better?"

"You don't have to look at me like that."

"How do you want me to look at you?"

"I want you to be happy for me."

"Happy for you?"

"Yes, happy for me."

"Happy for what?"

"Happy that I am in love."

"Sam's going to Montana with a few friends." I tell my husband later that night while I take my bath.

"What do you mean?"

"Sam, Becky, Laura, they're going on a riding trip together."

"Weren't they just there?"

"That was a dude ranch with their families. This trip is no kids, no husbands."

"They are going to go out at night and flirt with cowboys in bars."

I watch him clip his toe nails.

"I think I'm obligated to call Barry and tell him this."

"Tell him what?"

"Tell him that they are going to go out at night and flirt with cowboys in bars."

"I never said that."

"You don't have to."
He's over me now, touching my mouth, his eyes.
"I would have you followed."
I smile.
"You'd never go anyway."
He pushes hard, we don't have much time, the kids.
The soles of my feet are firmly planted in the mattress. My back is arched.

She looks great. Thin, tan.
"What happened?"
She pulls the wrapper off a red Charms lollipop.
"We watched the rain fall."
"And your friends?"
"They were sleeping."
The lollipop bulges through Sam's cheek when she smiles.
I order, "I'd like an egg-white omelet and a diet coke."
"Nothing for me."
I watch her bite off a piece of the lollipop and chew it.
"That's all you're eating?"
She leans in closer.
"He said, 'I want to kiss every part of your body.'"
"Did he?"
"Almost."
I imagine her wrapped in those arms of his, waiting for a burst of thunder, then counting, "One two, three, four, five, six—"
"—But we didn't sleep together." And then the flash of lightening.
"What do you mean?"
"I told him I wanted to wait."
A small cabin, the smell of hay, a smoldering fire.
"Wait for what?"
"Wait until we're together forever."

The check comes.
"What are you doing this afternoon?"
"I promised Rachel I'd take her for new shoes."
Rachel is her older one. "That's nice."
"She wants Corkies."
"Corkies?"
"Remember Corkies?"
"Sure."
"Corkies are back."
I smile. "Crowded in here today."
"Yeah."
Nine years we've been friends.
"Why Sam?"
"It gives me a little happiness."
"What part of it?"
"Being loved greatly is really good."
This is the part I don't understand.
"What does that even mean?"
"You're going to laugh."
"I'm not."
"You're laughing."
"I'm not laughing."
She scrapes a forkful of uneaten hash-browns off my plate.
"Did I tell you about my horse?"
"Your horse?"
"I'm leasing a horse."
"Where are you going to ride it?
"Central Park." She's excited.
"Central Park is not the same."
Outside, her long hair blows free from its ponytail.
"Barry didn't love you greatly in the beginning?"
"Barry was never my kindred spirit. He signed his note You are always with me, my kindred spirit."
"He wrote you a note?"
"He sent me pictures."
I look at her in all that turquoise jewelry, "You can't do this Sam."
"I'm careful."
"Everyone thinks they're careful."
"Anyway, he told me to be patient, that we share one broken soul, and one day—"
"One day you will be one again."
"Yes."
"That's a line."
"Maybe."
She gives me a kiss as a taxi pulls to the curb, "Maybe everything's a line."

The message says, "Sam has canceled lunch."
I call, "What's wrong?"
"Nothing?"
"You sound funny."
"I'm bleaching my teeth."
"You're bleaching your teeth?"
"I don't want them to look like my horse's mouth."
I think I might give up.
"He said, 'I had a really good time Sam.'"
"When did he say this?"
"We spoke today." I realize then that this is why she canceled lunch.
"What did you say?"
"I said, 'Me too.' and then I said, 'Tell me something.' and he said, 'It's crowded in here.' 'Tell me something anyway.' and then he said, 'I love you.'"
I can hear her smiling.
"Did you tell your doctor this?"
"Yes."
"And what did she say?"
"She said, 'See you Thursday.'"

"I don't know what to do." I tell my husband later that night while I take my bath.
"It's not your problem."
"How can you say it's not my problem?"
"You didn't fuck a cowboy."
"She didn't fuck a cowboy."
I watch him clip his toe nails.
"I think I'm obligated to call Barry and tell him this."
"Tell him what?"
"Tell him that his wife is fucking a cowboy.
"I never said that."
"You don't have to."

He's over me now, touching my mouth, his eyes.
"I would have you followed."
I smile.
"You'd never fuck a cowboy anyway."
He pushes hard, we don't have much time, the kids.
The soles of my feet are firmly planted in the mattress. My back is arched.

Her eyes look tired.
"I can't do it anymore." She stirs her coffee.
"What do you mean you can't do it?"
"I can't stay here."
"You can't stay here?"
"I am happy in the mountains."
"That's why it's called a vacation."
"You're not listening." I feel bad that she thinks this.
"I'm listening."
"You're not hearing what I'm saying."
I rest my fork on the edge of my plate. "What about the kids?"
"He'll take care of the kids."
"How is he going to take care of the kids?"
"He's got a job."
"He's a horseback riding teacher."
"Once I'm with him he'll be more than that."
"And you think Barry's just going to let you up and leave with his kids?"
She holds the mug at the edge of her lips. "The mother always gets the kids."
"Not always."
"Well I'll get the kids and the two of us will open a bed and breakfast and"
"—you'll have a simple life."
"Why does that seem so ridiculous to you?"
"Because you made a commitment."
"Barry was a different man when I married him."
"Barry's always been a Jewish guy from New York."
"Fine." She looks away.
"You promised those kids of yours a family."
"When did I promise them that?"
"The moment you decided to have them."
"I have two little girls" Her voice is diminished.
"Yes you do."
Sam puts down the mug, "I want them to know what it is to be happy."

The same things always give it away.
"How could you be that stupid?"
"Since when does Barry look at the phone bill?"
"Obviously he had a suspicion."
"Obviously."
We are strolling our kids through the zoo.
"You want one?" Still with those red lollipops.
"No thanks."
She pulls off the wrapper.
"What did you tell him?"
"I told him that he's crazy, that I'm planning a trip for us, why would I ever, how can he even think?—"
"And he believes you?"
"It's easy to believe what you want to believe."
She is really too thin. "You are really too thin."
I watch her unbuckle our kids. "Be careful guys."
"Never admit it Sam."
"I know."
"No, listen to me." I make her look at me. "Never admit it and move on."
"But—" Our kids, just in front of us are waddling hand in hand toward the seals.
"There are no buts."

"Sorry I'm late."
"That's okay."
"I feel like I spend my whole life waiting for workmen to come." Sam throws down her bag and snuggles into the booth.
"What's the problem?"
"That lemon yellow paper I chose for my bedroom is turning mustard so I thought I'd have the room painted. I picked a cool blue."
"Nice."
"Except that now it's turned into this whole ordeal. The paper needs to be peeled then the walls need to be sanded. Did you order?"
"I was hungry."
"That's okay, what did you get?"
"What did I get?" The waiter walks over to our table.
"I'll have an egg-white omelet too but with a few tomatoes."
"So?"
"So I'm better."
"You're better?"
"I'm okay."
"What do you mean?"
"I know he's out there and loves me so I'm okay." She takes a toe-nail scissors from her bag.
"What are you doing?"
"Looking for dead ends."
She snips a strand of split hair. I watch her do this, one, two, three times. "You're not okay."
She keeps searching, "Who's okay?"

"Men cheat all the time." I tell my husband later that night while I take my bath.
"Sure."
"Why is that accepted?"
"Men aren't careless."
"What does that mean?"
"Men don't fall in love."
I watch him clip his toe nails.
"I think I'm obligated to call Barry and tell him this."
"Tell him what?"
"Tell him that Sam's in love with a cowboy."
"I never said that."
"You don't have to."
He's over me now, touching my mouth, his eyes.
"I would have you followed."
I smile.
"You'd never fall in love with a cowboy anyway."
He pushes hard, we don't have much time, the kids.
The soles of my feet are firmly planted in the mattress. My back is arched.

A graduate of the MFA program at Columbia University, AMY KOPPELMAN lives in New York City and recently completed her first novel.

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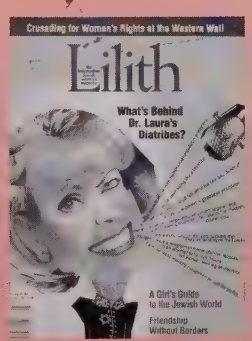

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Tashlich

BY YISKAH (JESSICA) ROSENFELD

And you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.
— Micah 7:20

Let me toss these sin sandwiches
into the water, my wrongs ribboned
through the bread. Let them be
the opposite of fortune cookies:

May this never happen
May this never happen
May this never happen

Water, I want to return.
With simple streams of forgetfulness
wash clean this residue of regret —

how I thought I could be made visible
through the wounds I inflict on myself
an intricate tattoo graffitied across my body:

Jessica was here
Jessica was here
Jessica was here

Erase it all so that again
as on the day I was born
my skin will be transparent as fingernail
my true name shining through

YISKAH (JESSICA) ROSENFELD teaches workshops combining Jewish mysticism, ritual and creative writing in the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds an MFA in poetry from Mills College and received the Reuben Rose Memorial Prize in poetry.

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Hineni

BY BONNIE LYONS

What I want
is to say Hineni:
the three-in-one Hebrew word
(our verbal trinity!)
meaning "Here I am" or
"I am here,"
even "I-here-am."
The patriarchs' answer to God's question:
"Where are you?"
God must know where we are
so the question means
"Are you listening?
Are you present
attending
now and here?"

Endless ways of not being here
of being in the past
or the future
or so self—
divided as to *be* no place
no I.
Then there is no present.
Then the present is empty—or full
only of anxiety or boredom.

Arriving in Vermont
I saw a sign:
"Moose crossing"
and wasted days
looking for that awkward-adolescent creature.
Then one evening on the screens
huge pale green moths—lunas!
and smaller violet and lemon ones—
art deco dreams—
No burning bush
but their translucent wings and
cotton candy bodies whispered,
"Look at, not for."
Hineni.

BONNIE LYONS, professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio, has published poems in *New Letters*, *Confrontations*, *Bridges*, *Midstream*, and other journals.

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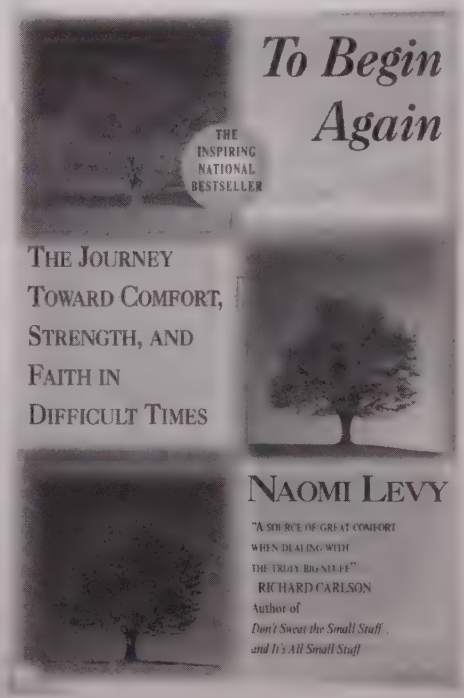
CAN READING SALVE GRIEF?

Death as a physical phenomenon is easy to comprehend; certain bodily functions, necessary for life, cease. On other levels—emotional, philosophical, and theological—death is harder to understand. Some deaths, which come at the end of fully led lives, are easier to accept. Other deaths, sudden violent events that claim young lives, such as accidents, murder or suicide, are harder to justify or explain.

My father died one of those sudden, violent deaths, at the age of 48, two years ago. I have spent those two years trying to make sense of his death. Like other mourners, I have turned to my family and to other people who have shared my experiences. I have turned to rabbis and, more generally, to Judaism. I have also turned to counselors and their avatars, grief books.

Looking to books for comfort and answers is similar to looking towards religion. Mourners seek a reflection of their own specific experience within a logical framework. For those who survive a loss, a tragic death challenges faith in the world as a good place. We want to understand what has happened to our loved one in the context of a world we can participate in positively, constructively, even joyfully.

I have come to realize that my search for comfort and answers leads me to ask questions about the presence of evil in the world. Where is God in all of this? How can tragedies like my father's suicide happen if God is in charge of the world? How can I still believe in such a God when something so horrible has happened to my family and me?


To Begin Again
THE INSPIRING NATIONAL BESTSELLER
THE JOURNEY TOWARD COMFORT, STRENGTH, AND FAITH IN DIFFICULT TIMES
NAOMI LEVY
"A SOURCE OF GREAT COMFORT WHEN DEALING WITH THE TRULY BIG STUFF"
RICHARD CARLSON
Author of
Don't Sweat the Small Stuff . . . and It's All Small Stuff

September 11, 2001 was my twenty-second birthday. I sat in front of the television most of that day in shock. At the end of that day I began to ask myself the same questions that my father's death had caused me to ask, on a larger scale. How do the events of that day fit into a religious understanding of the world?

Jewish funeral readings, traditional psalms for houses of mourning, and the daily liturgies of the morning, afternoon and evening services all describe and extol God as omnipotent creator of heavens and earth. In the Amida prayer, recited three times a day, we thank God, "for our lives that are bound up in your hands, for our souls that are remembered by you, and for your miracles that are every day with us." This litany does not easily co-exist with the anger induced by tragedy.

But the prayerbook was not the only place I looked for answers.

Memoirs of loss have not helped me. Everyone deserves to tell her story, but I just don't have patience to listen. I am reminded of *shiva* etiquette, and how a proper *shiva* caller waits for the mourner to speak first. Invoking this privilege of *shiva*, I have avoided more personal grief books. I want a book that will help explain what happened and allow me to have an honest relationship with Judaism that includes all my messy questions and conflicts.

Many memoirs of loss have to do with a long illness, and simply do not resonate with those of us whose losses were abrupt and without warning. Acknowledging the pain of these mourner-authors, I am nonetheless envious of the time they had with their loved ones before death. That difference makes those books, which might be very helpful to others, the opposite of helpful to me.

Rabbi Naomi Levy's *To Begin Again: The Journey Toward Comfort, Strength and Faith in Difficult Times* (Ballantine Books, $12.95) resonates with me in part because she has been through something like my experience—her father was shot and killed by a mugger when she was fifteen. Perhaps this leads us to have similar concerns, because she addresses the bigger questions of faith and loss. She explicates and encourages an authentic and full relationship to Judaism and God in the wake of terrible tragedy.

Rabbi Levy has had her own losses, and as spiritual leader of a congregation has seen many others. These stories, half the book, illustrate her points: that beginning again is possible, and that Judaism authentically makes room for pain, anger and questions. She addresses the faith questions that come up after a loss with strategies for working with and through the pain, towards a constructive and positive Jewish existence. Her stories sit side by side with philosophical and theological discussion.

Levy describes the evolution of her own understanding of God, long after her father's death: "I began to believe in a God who was just as outraged as I was, just as pained, and just as helpless to protect us from harm. The Prophet Isaiah describes God this way: 'In all their affliction God was afflicted.' God is not distant and unfeeling, but compassionate. God suffers when we suffer . . . I was no longer looking to God to prevent ugliness, I was looking to God for the strength to carry on in the face of ugliness."

I found comfort and strength in the soundness of Levy's description of the extent of God's direct power in the world. She points a way to healing through a new and mature understanding of God that avoids the self-defeating trap of resentment. Levy encourages prayer and study as ways to rebuild and renew after tragedy. The daily liturgy of Jewish prayer, however, describes and extols an all-powerful and completely just God. Acknowledging the mourner's experience of dissonance between

How can tragedies like my father's suicide happen if God is in charge of the world?

anger and praise, Levy includes prayers at the end of each section which address a wide range of feelings. These prayers underscore her point that all feelings belong inside anyone's relationship to God, inside a synagogue, inside our worship, and not just inside our heads. She gives mourners permission to re-interpret prayers or write our own. She empowers mourners to include their anger and struggle in their Jewish expression, encouraging us not to separate the words we say from the feelings that, at times, overwhelm us.

Here is one example:

> I am hurting, God. I feel lost, helpless, and alone. My tragedy seems so senseless. Help me, God, to embrace what I cannot understand, to find meaning in my suffering. Remind me that though I am powerless to choose my fate, I hold the power to choose a response to my fate. May I never be defeated. May I never grow bitter. May my sorrow lead me to strength, to compassion, and to You.

Also recommended:

• ***Living With Loss, Healing With Hope*** by Rabbi Earl A. Grollman (Beacon Press, $12.60). A beautiful book, written in simple, clear sentences laid out on the page in separate clauses, like poetry or a child's book. Reading this book feels like someone is speaking just to you. Quotations from Jewish texts and thinkers provide a philosophical and theological counterpoint to the comfort the book offers.

• Anita Diamant's ***Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead and Mourn as a Jew*** (Schocken Books, $13). Diamant's manual is a thorough walk-through of Jewish mourning rituals and includes several thought-provoking texts, translations of the unfamiliar prayers and psalms that are often read at funerals, and a chapter analyzing the Mourner's Kaddish along with eight different interpretations. Her inclusions of texts support her message that comfort can be found within the frameworks of Jewish communal and personal ritual, in the relationships and interactions that those rituals and customs require and create.

• The revised, expanded edition of Rabbi Maurice Lamm's classic ***The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*** (Jonathan David Publishers, $18.95). The 1969 edition of this book is largely expository, outlining the laws of death and mourning according to Orthodox Judaism. In his introduction to the revised edition, Rabbi Lamm discusses the need to make Jewish mourning laws more inclusive. He discusses discretionary mourners, those who are not covered by the traditional seven relations of mourning. He discusses the issues surrounding questions of women saying kaddish, and has added a new and much more sensitive section on suicide. Finally, he includes short essays about Jewish theological perspectives on death, immortality, resurrection and the afterlife. These additions to his exhaustive work on the laws of loss soften its legalistic tone. This book is a helpful resource.

I am fortified by Levy's understanding of God as a supportive presence and a fellow sufferer, receptive to cries of pain and anger as well as to litanies of praise. I return to the daily Amida with everything I feel. I can speak of my hurt and, at the same time, honestly thank God for daily miracles, for God's "wonders and goodnesses at all times, evening and morning and noontime." Both are important; without the pain or the gratitude, my prayers are incomplete.

Levy points out that most people do not revise a naïve concept of God until tragedy strikes. My painful loss has set me on the road towards a more nuanced and whole religious understanding. I have new questions and a new authentic engagement with prayer. I would still rather have my father back, but I am grateful for what I have now and can be grateful for what I had, even as I continue to mourn his loss.

SOPHIE DANIS OBERFIELD recently graduated from college and thinks someday of becoming a rabbi. Always on the lookout for more books that address difficult deaths and suffering from a theological standpoint, she asks that if you have any suggestions, email: *sophie.oberfield@aya.yale.edu*

THE COMPLICATED WORLD OF WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS

The surprising thing about the film "Kissing Jessica Stein" is just how many different people find it "cute": lesbian couples, men and women, even my parents.

While "Kissing Jessica Stein" sports the structure of a conventional love story—in this case, girl meets girl with some obstacles along the way—it's ultimately a charming exploration of one woman's stumbling quest toward happiness. The dialogue is literate, the acting invests the characters with depth, its humor strikes the right note between caricature and authenticity, and the cinematography shows off the New York that New Yorkers love.

Like Woody Allen's protagonists, Jennifer Westfeldt's Jessica Stein is funny, neurotic, smart, and Jewish. At 28, Stein is worried

that she'll be alone forever. Her dates with men start out promising but end up disastrous; the men all turn out to be hitched, gay or ugly. Helen Cooper (Heather Juergenson) is a sex-crazed downtown hipster, an assistant director at a Chelsea art gallery who juggles boyfriends but feels unsatisfied. On a whim, Helen places a woman-seeking-woman ad, and, on a whim, Jessica replies. The movie moves through some hilarious scenes as Jessica attempts to back out of the relationship even as she's falling for Helen. Throw in the tension of an ex-boyfriend/current boss, a matchmaking Jewish mom from Scarsdale, and an inquiring office-mate, and you have Jessica Stein's life.

Westfeldt and Juergenson make a striking couple. They play a pair of girly-girl lesbians (in one scene, they actually enjoy a lengthy discussion about lipstick) with an undeniable chemistry. In fact, everyone in the movie is good-looking, which is part of what makes "Kissing Jessica Stein" eminently watchable. The movie goes to pains not to offend, to make sure that there's something and someone for everyone. There's no on-screen sex in "Kissing Jessica Stein". Just a lot of, well, kissing. And no one on the screen seems to balk too much at these straight-girls-turned-lesbians. Even Jessica's mother, played by the gifted Tovah Feldshuh, embraces Jessica's choice without angst.

The success of "Kissing Jessica Stein" lies partly in the fact that Juergenson and Westfeld co-wrote the screenplay they've been developing since 1997, when its first incarnation, *Lipschtick*, played Off-Off Broadway.

"Kissing Jessica Stein" does not market itself as Jewish or lesbian but as "a fresh take on the subject of sex and the single girl." Critics have described it as a "hot date movie," and have called it the 21st-century version of "Annie Hall." I would argue it fits more firmly into the mold of gay ethnic comedy like "The Wedding Banquet" or even into a social comedy of errors, a là Jane Austen, with the Jewish content obvious from the opening High Holiday scene. And though the word "lesbian" is uttered only two or three times, there is plenty of posturing over what it really means today to date someone of the same sex.

One of Helen's gay friends chides her for believing she can choose to be a lesbian, tutting "Today, sexual preference. Tomorrow, henna tattoos," and insists that you're born gay the way you're born black. Another friend disagrees, pointing out that "An orgasm is an orgasm." In one of the funniest scenes in the movie, Helen pushes aside Jessica's "informational materials" about lesbian sex toys. When Jessica fails to understand how lesbian sex can be like straight sex, Helen declares, "Let's face it; it's the other stuff that works for women anyway."

While some Jews may thrill to the outcome (with its hint of continuity), others in the audience will be disappointed. They may judge the entire movie to have been barrelling toward a traditional ending, while the rest of the story was a mere diversion. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the movie. Take "Kissing Jessica Stein" on its own terms—as the story of one rigid woman's transformation into a looser and, ultimately, happier person—and Westfeldt's expressive face and acerbic wit will have you laughing and crying along with her.

REBECCA METZGER

LONGING AND LOSS: PEERING AT ISRAELI WOMEN'S LIVES

Miriyam Glazer's erudite introductory essay to her anthology *Dreaming the Actual: Contemporary Fiction and Poetry by Israeli Women Writers* (State University of New York Press, $24.95) is as compelling as the literary selections. Glazer argues that in the last decade Israeli literature has shed the dominance of a secular male Ashkenazi viewpoint to embrace a polyphony of ethnic and religious voices.

Like Israeli society, Israeli art has broken out of a straightlaced monochromatic national consciousness. Women writers, long marginalized as presenting a "personal" secondary voice, have taken center stage in the literary mainstream.

The writers Glazer has chosen range across a wide cultural spectrum—observant, newly immigrant, Arab, Sephardic, urban and rural. As diverse as Israel itself, these voices articulate birth themes of the new homeland, the place of Jewish tradition, and above all the pervasiveness of wars shadowing daily life.

The stories of the thirteen prose writers of varying ages and backgrounds are suffused with longing and loss. Yehudit Handel's heartbreaking "Apples in Honey" draws with delicate strokes a war widow's pain through her yearly graveside visit. She bedecks herself with bracelets, the anniversary presents of a brief marriage cut short by death. "For our tenth anniversary he said he would bring me one with garnets. . . it will get longer, every year this will get longer, the bracelets will get short and the counting will get longer . . . They don't close a cemetery, she said."

In Mira Magen's "Gerbera Daisies at Half Price" a woman who has left her secular husband behind to live with her child in an observant neighborhood is still conflicted about the decision. Her otherness as a single woman in an ultra-religious environment is confirmed by a startling erotic encounter with a male neighbor. Another story in which a sexual interlude with a stranger is used to reveal the isolation of the protagonist is Savyon Liebrecht's "It's Greek to You, She Said to Him" which explores a grown-up daughter's attempt to understand her mother's coldness, frigidity and anger by acting them out in a visit to her now empty childhood apartment.

(continued on page 42)

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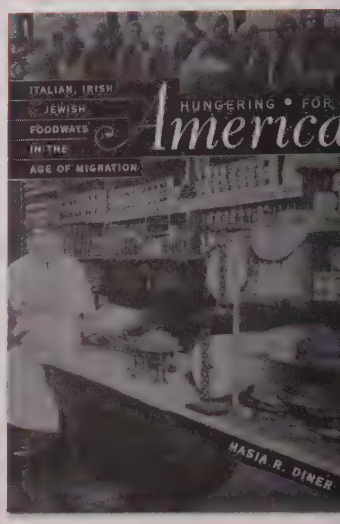

In **Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, & Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration** *(Harvard University Press, $39.95), historian Hasia Diner tells how Jewish women's relationship to food changed as they migrated from the poverty of Eastern Europe to the abundance of America:*

[In Europe] poor married women bore the brunt of the food system. They carried the burdens of "keeping kosher" while feeding their husbands and children . . . . Kashrut made cooking difficult, but particularly so for those of limited means. Just as the *korobka* [kosher food tax] made little impact on the rich who could afford to pay a tax on meat, so too the goose declared unkosher, or the dairy spoon polluted by contact with meat, would have been minor annoyances for someone with wealth. But for the poor these matters loomed large. The goose represented an investment of months of labor and money. The polluted spoon very well may have been the only one, shared by all family members.

To make matters worse, many poor women worked and could not cook for their families as they wanted to, or as society deemed they ought . . . .

Among the many stings of Morris Raphael Cohen's childhood poverty, he recalled with bitterness how his mother labored outside the home, so there were no regular meals for the family.

I was walking along with my young sister and we passed a house where people in the front room were having their midday meal, at which I looked longingly. I was ashamed to ask for anything, but I turned to my sister and inquired, "Friedke (Florence), are you hungry?" The mother of the family gave us each a piece of bread dipped in soup and launched into a tirade against my mother for leaving us alone all day and not providing us with sufficient food. But the delightful taste of the food prevailed over my indignation at the disrespect to my mother.

. . . [In America] daughters of "old mothers" rarely recalled either learning to cook or being forced to help in the kitchen. They complained mightily about endless hours of cleaning, tending smaller children, doing laundry, working in a family store. But cooking they rarely mentioned. They cooked during crises, but not routinely. Their failure to cite cooking or learning to cook under their mothers' tutelage reflected the realities of the young women's working lives, their pursuit of education and leisure, and their mothers' intentions of holding onto power through the kitchen. Mothers also had aspirations for their daughters which did not center on futures in front of the stove.

. . . The distinctiveness of the east European Jewish involvement with food in America also grew out of their passion for food. For a group of people who venerated food and described their hopes, dreams, and deepest memories in terms of food, conflict was unavoidable. Jewish women, those most intimately associated with cooking, bore the brunt of that conflict, which in turn exacerbated gender tensions. A cadre of critics publicly chided Jewish women for their allegedly poor cooking skills, blaming them and their tasteless meals for the disorganization of the Jewish home. Advertisers, nutritionists, social workers, rabbis, and journalists cajoled and appealed to Jewish women to save their families and their community by serving better food. No wonder that their daughters, with eyes already trained on entering the middle class and the professions, viewed their mothers' lives in the kitchen as narrow and not worth replicating.

(continued from page 40)

By accepting money in return for sexual favors with her neighbor, the protagonist in "If Nella Could Do It" by Shulamith Gilboa saves up enough to escape what she feels is the drudgery of rural domestic life. Her dubious achievement is to become the cunning proprietor of a tawdry clothing store selling "artificial silk . . . various percentages of polyester."

An interesting section is devoted to stories originally written in Russian by new Russian immigrants. In Dina Rubin's "Monologue of a Life Model," a former electrical engineer earns her living in Israel by posing in the nude. Cynical, defensive, and scraping to get along, she refuses to become beholden to anybody. Rebuffing a taxi driver's overtures she asserts, "I have no intention of feeding your local folklore with a story about Russian prostitutes." But once alone, her bravado drains out of her: "All in all, I'm only thirty nine, and I guess I've still got my figure. But I feel like I'm three hundred and eighty."

In "Schlaffstunde", a stunning story by Yehudit Katzir, two cousins weave a forbidden relationship of fantasy and love while their grandparents take their afternoon naps. But just as nightmares of the Holocaust interrupt their grandmother's sleep and death claims the uncle who discovers their sexual entanglement, their idyll is shattered as well. Meeting many years later at a family funeral, the woman's feelings for her cousin remain, while he, accompanied by his young wife, is emotionally and physically out of reach.

"War insinuates itself in every pore" writes poet Maya Bejerano, in an oft-repeated theme of the poetry which comprises half the volume. In "Gaza, Undated" Rachel Tzvia Back describes the pain of an Arab woman whose house the Israelis have razed: *With no tears you have seen her,/ dry like stone, like tile and alone./ We tore her house down and she may not rebuild/. . . After the rains, this mound will settle, sink/ in on itself, and forget what it was./ But she will not forget.*

Writing of Jaffa in 1948, Hamutal Bar Yosef's Arab and Jewish girls do business trading bubble gum for bread across the border fence: *"and the flies on her pus-filled eyes settle on mine, in the*

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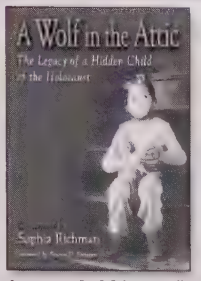

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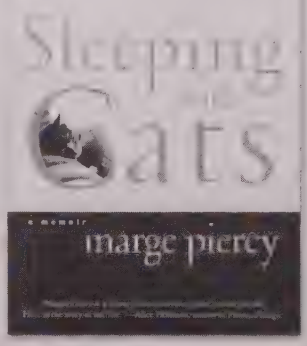
meantime/ import, export, a first taste of tourism." In another of her poems a mother grieves for her fallen son: ". . . and how is it I never knitted even one sweater for you?"

The ironic minimalist words of Arab/Israeli poet Nideaa Khoury speak volumes: *"In the land of milk and honey/whenever they pick unripe dates/ and children in their dawn/ the pain dries/ like curdled milk".*

Yet many of the poems are not linked specifically to Israel. Agi Mishol's "Shopping" explores infidelity when a woman meets her lover in the supermarket: *"I hugged you/ and you hugged a watermelon./ I loved you and you didn't/ know what to do/ with the watermelon . . . "*

Contrasts between Israeli and Western culture may be inferred from language itself. Yona Volach examines the gendering quality of Hebrew: *"English has all the sexual options/ Every I is really/ every possible sex/. . . Hebrew is a sex-maniac/ She wants to know who's speaking/ whose image whose picture/ exactly what the whole Torah forbids:/ looking at sex/ Hebrew peeks through a keyhole . . . "*



And as part of a section of American Israeli poets writing in English, Karen Alkalay-Gut retraces her mother's anguish upon learning of her daughter's impending move away from her to Israel: *"she could endure no more losses."*

Glazer, a scholar of literature who has lived and worked in both countries, aims to initiate a nuanced conversation between American and Israeli cultures. But even for a reader familiar with Israel, the range of voices makes it hard to imagine a generalized dialogue. The intense personal directness of the poems allow them to transcend the local and convey a universalist voice. In contrast, the stories in this volume are permeated with stifled love, twisted childhoods, misunderstandings, loneliness, and frustration. Largely lacking in humor, irony, fulfillment or joy, they paint a painful picture not of women in general, but of how women writers view their situation in the modern state of Israel.

HELEN SCHARY MOTRO

REVIEWERS
REBECCA METZGER is a freelance writer, arts publicist and poet, living in Brooklyn. • HELEN SCHARY MOTRO, an American lawyer and writer living in Israel, is a columnist for The Jerusalem Post.

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• **My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland** (by Puah Rakovsky, Indiana University Press, $26.95) peeks into the life of a turn-of-the-last-century Jewish activist. **Paula Hyman**, who edited Rakovsky's prose and wrote the introduction, is a contributing editor to Lilith.

• **All the Available Light: A Marilyn Monroe Reader** (Simon and Schuster, $14.00) is a new anthology from Lilith Fiction editor **Yona Zeldis McDonough**, whose short story "Zhid" ran in Lilith's spring issue.

• **Marge Piercy**, Lilith poetry editor, has recently told her own story in a memoir entitled **Sleeping With Cats** (William Morrow, $25.95). Here Piercy describes building a career as a poet and novelist, her search for lasting human relationships, and, of course, her attachment to her beloved feline companions. She weaves narratives in which women have names and life stories.

WELCOMING A BABY DAUGHTER

"When a son is born, every Jewish parent knows what ceremony will welcome him into the community . . . the *brit milah*, the circumcision ceremony. It is not as clear what to do to welcome a daughter, and that is both our challenge and our opportunity," writes Debra Nussbaum Cohen in **Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter: Creating Jewish Ways to Welcome Baby Girls into the Covenant** (Jewish Lights, $18.95). As this book correctly points out, the fact that there is no fixed ritual for ushering in Jewish daughters means that parents have the freedom to create more personal, creative celebrations.

This book provides a range of possible ceremonies through which to welcome baby girls into their Jewish identity, from ritual immersions to tree-planting celebrations. There are also options for more traditional Jews, who may prefer to honor their daughters with classical Jewish blessings of thanksgiving and praise.

Whether they are inspired by the *zeved habat* (a Sephardic ceremony for welcoming newborn girls) or by the *brit melach* (a contemporary ritual using salt to represent the Covenant), parents are sure to find ideas for marking the arrival of their new Jewish daughters.

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Volunteers for Israel. If you're 18 to 65, consider going to Israel on a 2–4 week program to work in medicine, maintenance and supply services, as a kibbutz volunteer, help children with special needs, or as a civil guard. Contact in USA: *(212) 339–6063; fax: (212) 318–6145; taliya@jazo.org.il; www.jewishagency.org.il*

Send cards to Israel. American rabbinical students studying in Jerusalem initiated this project now assisted by the Egged bus company. Handmade cards or pictures or posters of support and encouragement to Israel—including the name, age and community of the creators—will be posted on store fronts, bus stops, places of terrorist attacks and hospitals in Israel in the hope of improving morale in a bleak situation where many Israelis feel isolated. Send a personal card—or those of your school, camp, or other group—to: *Schechter Institute, c/o Dana Rone Saroken, Rehov Avraham Granot #4., PO Box 8600, Jerusalem, 91083. rafianddana@yahoo.com*

Children Caring for Children. Israeli parents and children invite others to join them in sending Palestinian children a small gift package along with a personal drawing or letter to demonstrate their belief that war is not the right path. For more information contact *Michal Pundak-Sagie (972–052 751261), Yarden Dankner (972–054 494020)*

LILITH's second annual prize in Jewish feminist fiction. Wanted: original stories with heart, soul and chutzpah illuminating issues central to the lives of contemporary Jewish women. First prize: $250 and publication in Lilith. Manuscripts should be double spaced and should not exceed 2500 words. Electronic submissions welcome. All submissions must be accompanied by a $15 reading fee (by check made out to Lilith Magazine or by credit card). All entries should include a separate cover sheet with name and contact information. No manuscripts will be returned. Deadline: December 1, 2002. *Lilith Magazine, 250 West 57th Street, Suite 2432, New York, NY 10107–0172, 1–888–2–LILITH. Lilithmag@aol.com. www.lilithmag.com*

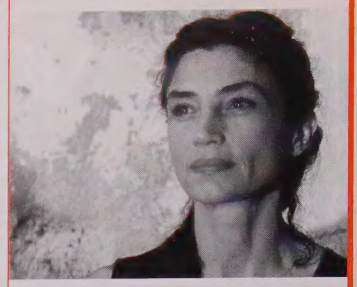
YOUR WRITING

Tense Dialogues: Speaking (across) Multicultural Differences. Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues, will examine this subject and how it affects Jewish society in the diaspora and in Israel. To be published in summer 2003 under the guest editorship of Marla Brettschneider. Submission of articles by October 31, 2002; proposals by July 31, 2002, preferably by e-mail: *dvorahg@zahav.net.il; Nashim, The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, POB 8600, Jerusalem 91083; fax: (972–2) 6790840.*

Unpaid Work. The women's movement has for decades been trying to get women's unpaid work recognized and valued by governments, social movement activists and families. Now an academic journal wants to marshal thinking on this theme. Send your interdisciplinary, critical or creative writing, in English or French, by February 28, 2003 to: *Cecily Barrie, Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal, Institute for the Study of Women, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3M 2J6; www.MSVU.ca/atlantis*

ON THE BIG SCREEN

Argentine-born German filmmaker Jeanine Meerapfel has made a film in which the protagonist, who just turned 50, returns to her grandmother's Greek island home to discover the Sephardic family's history.



"Anna's Summer" can be seen at the 22nd annual San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, held July 25–August 12; *(415) 621–0556; jewishfilm@sfjff.org*

The 18th Israel Film Festival—following runs in Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami—opens in New York June 13-27. It includes "Whose Land Is It?" directed by Liora Avni and "The Secret" directed by Ronit Kertsner. *At the Clearview Cinemas 59th Street East www.israelfilmfestival.com*

WORKSHOPS

Women Considering Becoming Single Mothers. Thousands of single women are making the conscious decision to become mothers by conceiving or adopting children on their own. (LILITH has published several articles about Jewish women making these women's choices and the new family paradigms they have created.) A weekend workshop, August 9–11, facilitated by nurse-midwife Debra Nodiff, and social worker Linda Woznicki will explore the complex issues involved. *Linda Woznicki, Institute for Holistic Studies, 150 Lake Dr., Rhinebeck, NY 12572; (845) 266-4444; LWoz@eomega.org; www.eomega.org*

tsena rena

A Suitcase Full of Love and Memories: Artist Sara Harwin uses Jewish reflections to spark memory and inspire hands-on creativity through ritual objects (from Pesach pillow covers to Mizrachim). She brings her workshops to large or small community groups. Harwin's goal is to help fill each participant's "suitcase" for a

more fulfilling Jewish life through the mitzvah of sanctifying holiday and daily life. *Sara Harwin, 9101 SW 15th Ave, Portland, OR 97219; (503)245–8900; fax (503)246–7479; www.harwinstudios.com*

SHOAH

Women's Holocaust Memoirs Collection. We think this is a first. The Frances and Kathryn Brandt and Lilith Magazine Women's Holocaust Memoir Collection at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor brings together books of memoirs, analysis and history. It is made possible through the generosity of Lilith board member Frances Brandt.*www.lib.umich.edu/area/Near.East/judaica.html*

There Once Was A World, a book by Yaffa Eliach, chronicles 900 years of the shtetl of Eishyshok where she was born and where 3500 Jewish residents were massacred in 1941. Eliach, whose mother and grandmother were photographers [see Lilith Fall 1992] also created the Tower of Life at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum from 15,000 photos of shtetl life. Now she is working together with the town of Rishon LeZion in Israel to reconstruct the shtetl as a living museum in which costumed residents will give tours. You will be able to see a Yiddish play in the town's theater, visit synagogues, eat typical food, make purchases, and even hold old-fashioned weddings. Eliach's goal is to collect $1,000,000 to fund this project. *The Shtetl Foundation, 300 E. 54th St. #23K, New York, NY 10022; (212) 319–2927; fax (212) 751–7932; shtetlfoundation@prodigy.net*

BRUSH UP YOUR HEBREW

Modern Hebrew Literature is a twice-yearly publication with reviews and excerpts in English of recently published Hebrew works from Israel. A one year subscription is $12. You can learn about other publications as well on the website of this organization that offers foreign rights and encourages the translation and dissemination of Israeli literature. *Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature. POB 10051, 52001 Ramat Gan, Israel; (972) 3–579–6830; fax (972)3–579–6832; litscene@ithl.org; www.ithl.org.il*

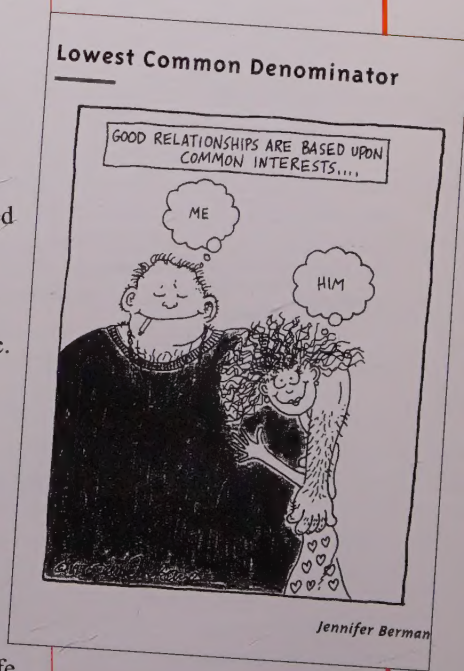
Students with little or no Judaic background applying to Jewish middle and high schools are being mainstreamed through their participation in special preparatory tracks. If you have a child in this situation, take a look at a report commissioned by a pioneer in the funding of such programs, "The Effectiveness of Preparatory Tracks in Jewish Day Schools," from *the Avi Chai Foundation, 1015 Park Ave., New York, NY 10028; (212)396–8850; fax (212)396–8833.*

NEW WAYS TO RESIST VIOLENCE

Violence Against Women on the Internet is an online course exploring ways in which this violence is facilitated through the use of the Internet, as well as how you can use the Internet to resist such violence. Learning modules include "Campus Sexual Assault Policies," "Safety," and "Sex Trafficking." The not-for-credit course, taught by Diane L. Rosenfeld, offered by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, is free and open to the public. ***@cyber.law.harvard.edu; http://eon.law.harvard.edu/vaw02/***

The New Start Loan Fund provides interest-free loans of up to $5,000 to help women who are extricating themselves from unusually difficult life situations, primarily abusive homes, to achieve economic self-sufficiency. For an application or information about this fund created by the Women's Executive Circle of New York's UJA Federation Campaign, contact *Judith Stecklow (212)836-1533; stecklowj@ujafedny.org*

Life's a Stitch: The Best of Contemporary Women' Humor, a collection of stories, sketches, poems and cartoons edited by Anne Safran Dalin and illustrated by Flash Rosenberg, includes the work of Roz Chast, Delia Ephron, Julie Gold, Judith Viorst, Wendy Wasserstein and others. Royalties benefit the American Foundation for AIDS Research, The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organzations. $16.95 at your bookstore; *www.lifesastitch.net*



—compiled by Naomi Danis

Hyphenates Attract

ZACHARY PELTA-HELLER

Though it's tricky to enunciate and routinely made fun of, I've always been proud of my hyphenated last name. I love the sheer convenience of it—the fact that it conveys a lot about me without my having to say a thing. Yes, I come from a family with liberal, egalitarian values; yes, I have feminist parents who, as Sixties' children, had (and continue to have) no problem with unorthodox departures from cultural norms. To some extent, I have inherited who I am, and my hyphen, with elegant economy, imparts a lot of the essential me: left-leaning and tolerant, willing to take a chance on untried solutions to dilemmas. And, oh yes, did I mention that I'm Jewish?—because (no surprise here) almost every hyphenate I've ever met turns out to be Jewish, too.

We hyphenates can wax passionate about our little chips of grammar, believing them to be the most important new jot or tittle of the latter part of the twentieth century. No other diacritic comes close to packing such a wallop of meaning, and certainly not with such minimalism. We measure the social politics of our environments—leftish summer camps, rightish Hebrew schools, edgy film seminars, gentrifying neighborhoods—simply by counting the number of hyphenates on the attendance sheet. A high-minded social action group will inevitably contain a small posse of us. Public school? Very few. A selective East Coast college? A veritable little flock.

Though I'm only 21, I'm actually a greybeard of the hyphen-nation. That is, there are very few hyphenates older than me, but quite a few younger. We pioneering elders particularly love being an elite sub-group, comprising a priestly caste entirely of our own. Think of it: We are members of a splinter race who literally embody the radical thinking of our baby-boomer mothers, flesh-and-blood emblems of a generation of enlightened women, and the men—some enlightened, some more, like, well . . . browbeaten—whom they married. How cool is that? And as if any of this needed a cherry on top (which it doesn't), even G-d—according to the Orthodox orthography, anyway—spells His/Her name with a hyphen.

On the downside (okay, there is a small downside), most parents of hyphenates (being part of a pretty narcissistic generation) didn't really think through what it was going to be like for us kids to shlep around our mouthfuls. I, for example, have suffered "Pelota," "Peiat," "Pelter-Helter," "Pita-Heller," "Peltaheller," "Peltyweller," and, of course, "Helter Skelter."

On mailings, I routinely become "Zachary P. Heller;" I endlessly have to explain to clerks in drugstores that yes, there *is* such a thing as a surname that contains a hyphen; and I'm used to those cramped forms that inevitably turn me into "Pelta-Hell." On standardized tests where you have to blacken in the bubble letters, I always have to ask what to do, since there are no bubbles for hyphens. Computers can suck, too—we fellow hyphenates often vent shared frustration over not being able to make reservations for airline tickets or open bank accounts: Our hyphens (or so we're told) bollux up the systems.

On the other hand, being hyphenated—like being carbonated—has taught us to be people who are lighthearted, creative and flexible. I have always enjoyed, for example, inventing new identities for each mispronunciation—"Pealer-Healer" becoming an expert chef by day, physician attempting to rid the world of disease and illness by night, and "Helter-Skelter" being an avid music lover slash serial killer, who naturally is having a hard time getting his life in order.

We also soothe ourselves by collecting names that are worse than our own: Brittany Vdovichenko-Tykachynski, for example, Adina Burger-Berger, and Jeremy Small-Weiner being some favorites.

Walking around with my hyphenated last name, I am a tireless sandwich board for my parents' feminism.

And finally (our parents didn't think this one through at all!) there is the inevitable: intra-species dating—which should not be surprising, given that hyphenates generally hail from deeply similar backgrounds. For me and my girlfriend of two years—Anna Nettie Forman-Greenwald (at least my parents were kind enough not to give me a middle name)—falling in love was nothing short of kismet, the natural impulse of our hyphens to come together as though they were two oppositely-charged bar magnets.

At parties, introducing ourselves inevitably sets off rounds of animated conversation, leading to the absolutely hilarious question that nearly everyone asks in a smug, high-pitched voice when they first meet us: "What will you two do if you get married?!?"—which, all jokes aside, is a true dilemma . . . which we vanguard twenty-somethings will be the first to break our teeth on. Should we males continue the feminist ethic that begat us and let our wives pass on their names, in which case our mothers will lose their legacies after all? Or should we start our own traditions (while simultaneously living out our mothers' feminist hopes) by creating new hyphenates comprised of only our matriarchal lines?

Whichever way hyphenates eventually go, my girlfriend and I—in the meantime—retain our stock answer to that incessantly asked party question. "We're thinking of just dropping all of these fucking names," we explain indulgently, "and just going with either 'Cher' or "Dubya.'"

ZACHARY PELTA-HELLER is a freshly minted graduate of Brandeis University, pursuing a career in writing.